

Knesset gives first approval for controversial reform bill

Draft law seen as discriminating against majority of Jews living outside Israel

TEL AVIV (AP) — In a move sure to inflame tensions with world Jewry, Israel's parliament gave initial approval Tuesday to a bill that would render conversions to Judaism performed by a non-orthodox rabbi invalid in Israel.

The conversion bill, demanded by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religious coalition partners, passed its first of three required readings by a 51-32 vote with seven abstentions.

Liberal lawmaker Dedi Zucker denounced the decision as "a bill of divorce to most of the Jewish people," who belong to the conservative or reform streams.

"They live as Jews, my friends, don't divorce them," Mr. Zucker shouted, pointing to the religious lawmakers. "We will be the first state in the world to tell these Jews, 'you're inferior.'"

He was interrupted by Rabbi Avraham Ravitz of the United Torah Jewry Party, who denied there was any intention to alienate world Jews. "They are all our brothers," Mr. Ravitz said. "We just don't recognise their conversions... or yours."

The bill comes at a time of debate over who is a Jew.

The Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada formally declared Monday that the reform and conservative teachings "are not Judaism at all." Some reform, conservative and orthodox rabbis attacked the declaration and said the union, founded in 1902, is on the fringes of Jewish thought in America.

A 1990 study of U.S. Jews found that 41 per cent are reform, 40 per cent are conservative, about seven per cent are orthodox and two per cent are reconstructionist, with the rest mostly unaffiliated.

But in Israel, the majority of Jews are secular, and the vast majority of those who are observant to various degrees are orthodox. Furthermore, the orthodox establishment controls marriage, divorce and death proceedings in Israel, all based on the orthodox definition of who is a Jew.

The bill would erode the limited recognition within Israel that the reform and conservative movements had gained under Israel's previous, liberal government.

It would reverse a November 1995 decision by Israel's supreme court, which ruled that reform and conservative conversions performed in Israel were legitimate. Before that,

non-orthodox conversions were recognised only if performed abroad.

But the decision has never been implemented — the interior ministry still registers as Jews only those born into the Jewish faith or converted by orthodox rabbis — and the orthodox parties have pushed for the bill as a means of blocking it.

These parties won a record 23 out of 120 Knesset seats in last May's election; they comprise about a third of Mr. Netanyahu's governing coalition and have threatened to bring down the government unless the conversion bill passed.

In a sign of the religious parties' power, several opposition legislators loathe to offend them stayed away from the vote — including Ehud Barak and Yossi Beilin, the main candidates in the upcoming primary for the Labour Party's candidate for premier.

Mr. Netanyahu claimed Monday that the issue was being blown out of proportion because it merely makes formal the existing practice.

"This law does not make any substantive change in our relations with world Jewry," Mr. Netanyahu said. "There is an awful lot of misunderstanding in the Jewish world."

Avraham Burg, head of the Jewish agency, which is responsible for Israel's relationship with overseas Jews, has warned that Israel would lose its strong lobby in Washington if it alienated American Jews.

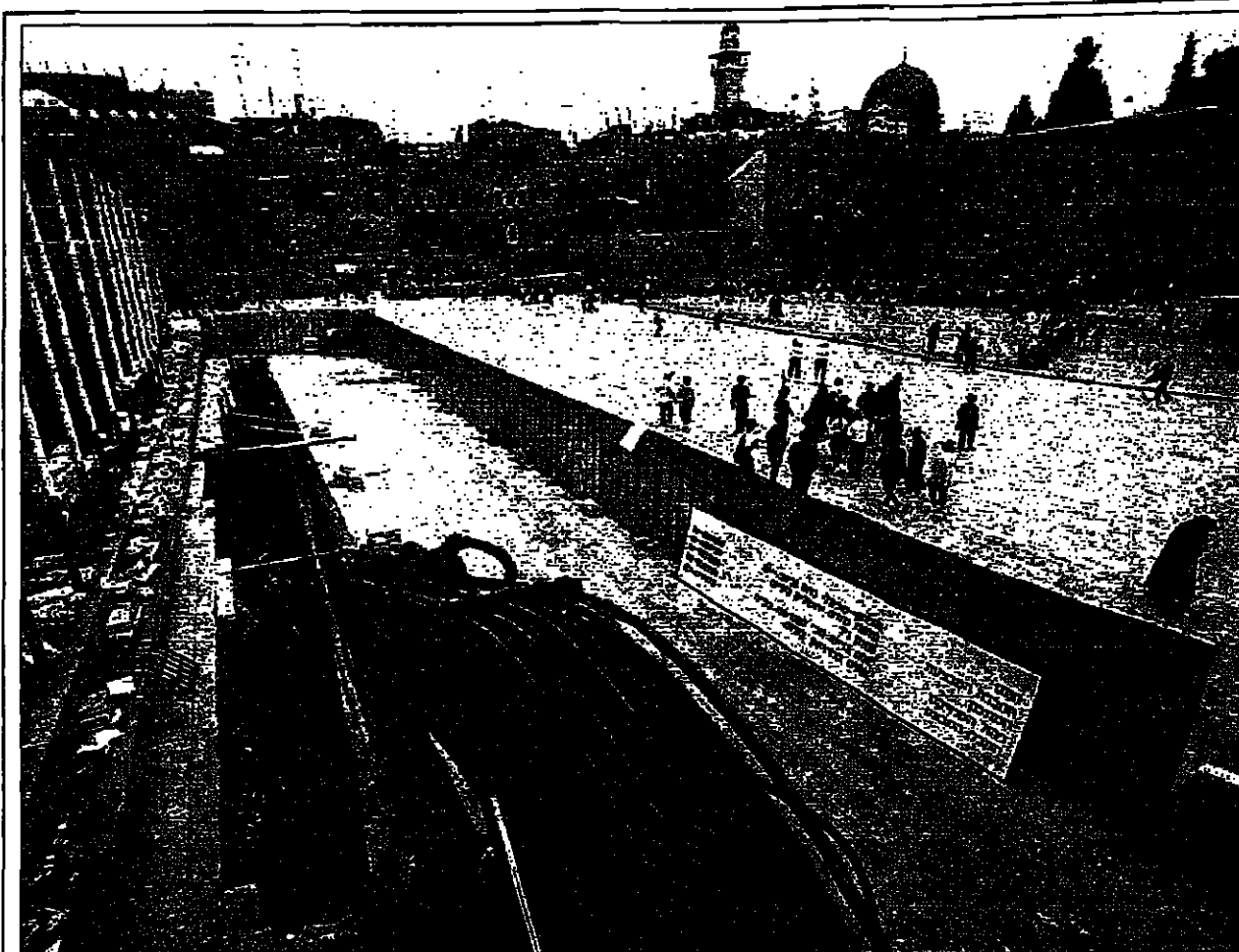
There is also discomfort among Mr. Netanyahu's allies at the move: coalition chairman Michael Eytan even suggested Tuesday that the bill would be quietly shelved if the reform and conservative movements dropped legal efforts to gain full equality.

Orthodox legislators have said they would like to expand the bill to delegitimise non-orthodox overseas conversions as well. They say that this is the only way to block easy conversions by non-Jews who want only to come to Israel to improve their financial situation.

Jews have the automatic right to immigration and citizenship in Israel.

Sponsors of the bill in the coalition government said the measure would also pass its second and third readings in the Knesset, to become law.

But first it will be handed to a special committee created to seek a compromise version less antagonistic to reform and conservative Jews.



NEW ISRAELI EXCAVATIONS IN JERUSALEM: A general view of a sewage tunnel (left) in the construction site at the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem on Monday. An ancient cardo (street) from the late Roman period was discovered during construction three weeks ago, which may lead to a new and controversial excavation operation (AFP photo)

Turkish army kills 33 PKK guerrillas in new spring offensive

DIYARBAKIR (AFP) — Turkish troops killed 33 separatist Kurdish rebels in the troubled southeast in the last two days of a spring offensive, local sources said Tuesday.

They said the military operations were part of a vast offensive in the provinces of Tunceli, Siirt and Sirnak against the outlawed Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK).

In the largest clash in a mountainous area in Tunceli province, the troops killed 22 PKK members on Monday. In other fighting in Sirnak and Siirt, another 11 rebels were killed.

No information was immediately available on losses among security forces.

The fighting marked an upsurge in clashes between the two sides following a relatively quiet winter with severe weather conditions. The Turkish army has launched spring offensives against the PKK in late March for the past several years.

In March 1995, more than 35,000 Turkish troops, supported by tanks and air power, entered neighbouring northern Iraq to hunt PKK rebels and stayed there for six weeks.

Iran rights picture gives mixed signals

GENEVA (AFP) — A U.N. human rights report on Iran issued here Tuesday reported progress on the status of women, offset by soaring executions and discrimination of religious minorities.

The author, U.N. special representative for the commission Maurice Copithorne, noted that the farwa against British writer Salman Rushdie remained in force but his language was muted on the subject.

In contrast, U.S. permanent representative to the U.N. in New York, William Richardson, forcefully condemned the fact that an Iranian foundation had increased the reward for killing Mr. Rushdie, whose "Satanic Verses" work is accused of blaspheming Islam.

"What action could more starkly demonstrate Iran's contempt for the international community's commitment to human rights," said Mr. Richardson in his address Tuesday to the commission's 53rd session.

Mr. Copithorne said public debate on the status of women seemed to be growing more "vigorous, particularly as more women speak out, and some measure of change appears to be occurring in the legal regime."

Women had been appointed members of the fifth Majlis (parliament) which had created a women's commission, the report

said. New laws had been adopted on family allowances for working and retired women, and there were more numerous articles in women's magazines, some written by clerics, appearing to advocate "significant change in the government's attitude to women," the report said.

The report, quoting scholars outside Iran, said there had been movement "in the right direction" in terms of women's access — for the middle class at least — to tertiary education, employment and in the attitude towards family planning and to amendments to divorce and polygamy laws.

With regards to the death penalty, Mr. Copithorne said external reports had put the numbers of sentences carried out in 1996 as twice the level of the previous year. He had received no response to repeated requests for official statistics.

"Many of the death sentences are reportedly imposed for drug trafficking. Recently there has been an upsurge in allegations of spying, which can carry the death penalty."

The report said use of torture was apparently still widespread, prisoners of conscience allegedly continue to linger in Iranian jails despite official denials and corporal punishment, such as stoning and amputations continued.

Israeli-backed militiaman killed in Lebanon

TYRE, Lebanon (AFP) — A member of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) was killed Tuesday in an ambush by Hizbollah guerrillas in the Israeli "security zone" in southern Lebanon, security sources said.

Four SLA militiamen were wounded in the attack by Hizbollah fighters armed with automatic weapons and anti-tank rockets near the village of Tayr Harfa on the western edge of the self-declared Israeli buffer zone in southern Lebanon.

A spokesman for the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of Hizbollah, in this southern Lebanese port claimed responsibility for the attack on an SLA armoured vehicle. "Our commandos blew up an M-113 armoured vehicle, killing or wounding the occupants," the spokesman for the movement said.

Sources close to the SLA said the M-113 troop transport had been hit by a Sager anti-

tank rocket. Israeli mortars and tanks riposted to the attack, raining shells for half an hour on the outskirts of the village of Majdal Zun. Lebanese police said. No casualties were reported.

Hizbollah fighters have killed one SLA militiaman and wounded 11 members of the 3,000-strong force since the beginning of the year.

Later Tuesday, two U.S.-built Apache gunships fired their machine guns on ravines near the village of Kfar Tibnit, where guerrillas were suspected of attempting to infiltrate the Israeli-held border enclave, according to security officials.

The guerrillas were spotted about 500 meters from hilltop outposts at Ali Taher, which are manned by Israeli soldiers and SLA militiamen.

Yemen seeking peaceful release of hostages

DUBAI (AFP) — Yemeni security forces have surrounded the area where four elderly Germans are being held captive by tribesmen but are seeking the release of the hostages through peaceful means, officials said Tuesday.

"The security forces have hermetically sealed off the area where the kidnappers are holed up so as to guarantee the hostages' security and their liberation in the coming hours," a Yemeni Interior Ministry official said.

"The Interior Ministry is deploying continuous efforts to get the four hostages released," the official was quoted by the presidential party newspaper Al Mithaq as saying.

The two German couples were abducted Thursday in the Maabarib area, where they had been sighted, by a tribe that was seeking to pressure the government, a common practice in Yemen.

A security official in the Maabarib area some 200 kilometres east of the capital Sanaa told AFP that the authorities "are concentrating on a peaceful solution and don't want to resort to violence because they want no harm to come to the tourists."

"We hope that the negotiations between the tribal chiefs and the kidnappers will bring quick results," the official, who asked not to be identified, told AFP by telephone.

He added that the four Germans were "in good health" and that the mediators, who are notable from the same tribe as the kidnappers, the Jihm, have been able to see the captives.

The official said the abductors' demands were "minimal" but would not disclose what they were. He added that "the authorities have no intention of giving in to them."

The German embassy refused to comment.

The four are being held in a house in the village of Al Mahajza, local authorities said.

Earlier this month seven German motorcycle tourists were kidnapped by 50 armed tribesmen near Tarim, 750 kilometres east of Sanaa, and held by members of the Manahil mountain tribe, north of the oil-rich Wadi Massila area, for 10 days.

France wants Turkey as EU candidate

ANKARA (AFP) — French Foreign Minister Hervé De Charette said Tuesday that Turkey should take part in a proposed European conference which would gather European Union (EU) countries and potential EU members.

"Turkey should be invited to the European conference," Mr. De Charette told Turkey's Anatolia news agency before leaving Paris for a tour of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey.

France proposed the convening of the European conference to discuss EU enlargement at a foreign ministers meeting of the union in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, on March 16.

The EU is yet to make a formal decision on the issue, but European diplomats said the general tendency supported convening such a conference.

However, they said there was no consensus on whether to invite Turkey, adding that some EU members, including Germany, were against adding Ankara to the list of candidate countries.

Mr. De Charette said the candidacy of all potential members, including Turkey, should be treated under the same political and economic criteria.

His remarks echoed a statement by Dutch Foreign Minister Hans Van Mierlo who said in Apeldoorn: "Turkey is ... recognised as having a European future and should be judged on the same basis as other countries." The Netherlands is holding the EU's rotating presidency.

Mr. De Charette will begin on Wednesday a two-day official visit to Ankara and

meet President Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller. He may also come together with Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.

Mr. Van Mierlo will also have talks with Turkish leaders here on Thursday.

Remarks by Mr. De Charette and Mr. Van Mierlo followed a statement by Western Europe's Christian democratic and conservative parties in early March, which ruled out Muslim Turkey's future membership to the union due to economic, political and cultural reasons.

Denouncing the move by Europe's centre-right movements, Turkish officials blamed German Chancellor Helmut Kohl for raising the argument that Turkey's Muslim tradition represented an insurmountable obstacle to it being brought into the European Union.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05Flintstones
14:30 Cartoon — Adventures of the Rainbow Pond
15:00French Programmes
16:00America's Funniest People
16:25Escape from Jupiter
16:50Doc — Challenge
17:15Border Town
18:00French Programmes
19:30News Headlines
19:35Comedy — Grace Under Fire
20:00Children's Diary
20:30Challenges
21:10 Drama — Spencer for Hire
22:00News in English
22:25Cobra
23:00Hart to Hart

PRAYER TIMES

04:00Fajr
05:19(Sunrise)Duba
11:39Dhuhr
15:12Asr
17:59Maghreb
19:18Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifiah, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 634590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Amman International Church Tel. 827126
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
Dr. Mukhlis Mazahreh 820425
Dr. Wissam Hazyin 748563
Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyib 620115
Dr. Munther Al Qraini 779959
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 890280
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nairookh pharmacy 623672
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh 250080
Al Quds pharmacy (—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Salah Al Safarini 987565
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390

Humidity readings: Amman 35 per cent. Aqaba 27 per cent.

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Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390

Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Husseini Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, 644281/6
Khalid Maternity, 642441/2
Ajliah Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 66727/9

The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir, 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital, 674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital (02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200 where it should always be verified.

Information on other flights are supplied on phone 08 (52700) or 08(53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dhab, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:05Aqaba (add) (RJ)
09:15Lamaca, Damascus (RJ)
14:40 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:30London (RJ)
16:40 Toronto, Montreal (RJ)
17:00Paris (RJ)
17:05Istanbul (RJ)
17:55Brussels, Berlin (RJ)
18:05Rome (RJ)
18:20Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
23:10Beirut (RJ)
00:10Cairo (RJ)
03:55 Singapore, Kuala Lumpur (RJ)
Other Flights
03:40London (BA)
06:00London (BA)
09:00Cairo (MS)
09:15 Karachi, Abu Dhabi (PK)
10:00Sanaa, Hudaidah (IY)
11:00Jeddah (SV)
12:10 Doha, Abu Dhabi (GF)
13:30Tunis (TU)
14:05Vienna (OS)
15:20Algiers (AF)
16:00Doha (Q7)
19:30 Istanbul, Damascus

(PK) London (GA)
Beirut (ME)
Paris, Damascus (AF)
Tel Aviv (LY)
Istanbul (TK)
Amsterdam (KL)
Athens (OA)

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
09:20Aqaba (RW)
18:55Tel Aviv (RW)
06:30Aqaba (add) (RJ)
09:45 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
09:50Rome (RJ)
10:45 Berlin, London (RJ)
11:30Casablanca (RJ)
11:45Istanbul (RJ)
19:00Calcutta (add) (RJ)
19:20Colombo (RJ)
19:35Beirut (RJ)
20:05Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:10Cairo (RJ)
20:15New Delhi (RJ)
20:50Bombay (RJ)
21:05Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
22:25Bangkok (RJ)
22:40Sanaa (RJ)
Other Flights
07:45Beirut (ME)
08:55London (BA)
09:55London (BA)
10:00 Damascus, Istanbul (PK)
11:00Hudaidah, Sanaa (IY)
12:30Jeddah (SV)
13:00 Bahrain, Muscat (GF)
14:50Vienna (OS)

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in J.P.S per kg

Apple780/500
Banana600/500
Banana (imported) 980/600
Cabbage120/80
Carrot180/120
Cauliflower200/100
Cucumber (large) 230/100
Cucumber (small) 360/200
Eggplant240/100
Fava beans450/300
Garlic1550/600
Grape fruit190/130
Lemon500/250
Marrow (large) 250/120
Marrow (small) 390/200
Onion (green) 240/180
Onion (dry)400/250
Orange600/300
Peas920/700
Pepper (hot)650/350
Pepper (sweet) 640/300
Potato380/200
Radish150/80
Spinach270/150
String beans1000/700
Tomato420/250

Ensour requests regular reports from Cabinet

AMMAN (Petra) — Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour Tuesday requested that Cabinet members submit regular reports to Council of Ministers' meetings, regarding the performance and activities of their respective ministries in economic and services fields.

The request came at a regular Cabinet session, which Dr. Ensour chaired as Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali in Washington to attend talks His Majesty King Hussein is holding with the U.S. administration, according to Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi.

Subsequent to the Cabinet session, Dr. Mutawi explained that Dr. Ensour briefed the ministers on HRH Crown Prince Hassan's recent meetings with journalists and other media representatives.

He said that during the session, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi reported on the deliberations of the members of the Jerusalem Committee from their

meeting in Morocco during which they discussed the situation in the occupied Arab territories as well as Israeli actions in Arab Jerusalem.

Minister of Interior Nathir Rasid submitted a report covering ministry preparations for the upcoming general elections while Minister of Finance Suleiman Hafez reported on arrangements for the inauguration of the Jaber border post on the common border between Syria and Jordan.

He said agreement was reached with Damascus to officially open the border post on April 15.

Along with the border post at the Ramtha crossing, the new post will be used for trucks and passenger vehicles in northern Jordan.

In reference to the planned Jordanian-Israeli joint airport project in Aqaba (see separate story), Dr. Mutawi affirmed that joint technical committees entrusted with the project will convene shortly.

He said that Jordanian ministers travelling abroad have delayed the

meeting which was scheduled to convene Monday.

After the cabinet meeting, Dr. Ensour visited Parliament and met Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Sa'd Hayel Srour who subsequently stated that the two exchanged views regarding cooperation between the executive and the legislative authorities as well as other issues of public concern.

Dr. Ensour reaffirmed the government's eagerness to strengthen cooperation between the two authorities as well as maintain constant consultations with the Parliament on national issues, Mr. Srour said.

The minister also met Senate Speaker Ahmad Lawzi and the two discussed similar topics.

Mr. Lawzi affirmed that the two exchanged views on economic legislation, already endorsed in Parliament and stressed its importance in promoting economic investments in the Kingdom.

Jordan committed to agreement on Aqaba airport project — minister

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan remains committed to its agreement with Israel to develop the Aqaba airport and the postponement of a meeting with Israeli officials this week on the project had no political implications, Information Minister Samir Mutawi said Tuesday.

Dr. Mutawi was commenting on statements attributed to Israeli officials that Jordan has suspended talks on the airport project "in the first sign of chilling relations between the countries."

Avner Ovadia, spokesman for the Israeli transport ministry, was quoted as saying that Jordanian officials informed Israel that they were postponing talks slated for Monday and Tuesday as well as a meeting between the transportation ministers of the two countries.

"The Jordanians have postponed the talks for no convincing reasons," Mr. Ovadia was quoted as saying by the French news

agency, AFP.

The delay in talks between the two countries, which signed a peace agreement in 1994, came a day after foreign ministers of the Arab League recommended that the 22 members of the pan-Arab body freeze relations with Israel.

But Dr. Mutawi maintained no link between the postponement of the meeting and the Arab League talks held in Cairo.

"A meeting was to be held between the Jordanian and Israeli sides concerning the joint Aqaba airport by the end of March or beginning of April," said the minister. "But due to the absence of the Jordanian ministers in charge of this matter, this meeting was postponed."

"The Arab League ministers' conference in Cairo had nothing to do with the postponing of the meeting (on the airport)," said Dr. Mutawi.

The minister described reports of the "suspension" of the Israeli-Jordanian talks appearing in the Israeli press as baseless and said they had "nothing to

do with the reality of things."

Dr. Mutawi reaffirmed Jordan's commitment to the airport project.

"The studies and plans have been drawn up with the utmost urgency to finalise work concerning the joint airport" since the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty in October 1994 and such work "has not stopped up to this day," added the minister.

A U.S.-funded feasibility study has been completed on the project and Jordan and Israel have reached the point of finalising financing proposals and related issues.

This week's postponed meeting was to include talks on the founding of a joint company to oversee the airport and the establishment of an association for pilot rights.

Israel's fun news agency reported Monday that Israeli Transport Minister Yitzhak Levy will meet soon with his Jordanian counterpart to discuss the project.

Mr. Levy on Monday met

with the Israeli ambassador designate to Jordan, Oded Eran, and said the Israeli government was interested in implementing the project, him reported.

The project involves the expansion of Aqaba airport to serve as a regional facility to serve both Jordan and Israel.

Israel's Eilat airport, a few kilometres from the Aqaba facility, is seen as too small to accommodate an expected increase in the number of tourists coming to the region, and hence the proposal to expand the Jordanian airport.

In another development, the Israeli embassy Monday confirmed that a car, recently vandalised, presumably in an effort to steal it, did not belong to the ambassador but was a rented car used by an embassy employee.

Reports had said that the vehicle was the ambassador's car. There is no Israeli ambassador present in Amman at the moment after Shimon Shamir left last month at the end of his contract with the Israeli government.

Jordan to participate in global conferences

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan is slated to participate in both the 97th meeting of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), to open in South Korea on April 10, and the conference of speakers of parliaments in Mediterranean countries, to open in Athens on April 6.

Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Sa'd Hayel Srour, who is leading Jordanian delegations to both meetings, Tuesday maintained that significant regional and international issues are slated to be discussed in the meetings.

In reference to the Athens meeting, Mr. Srour, who is leaving Wednesday, described participating countries as the same which participated in the 1995 Barcelona conference and "signed the Barcelona Declaration."

He stated that delegates

will discuss cooperation among the region's parliaments and ways to implement the Barcelona Declaration.

Referring to the Seoul meeting, Mr. Srour said that the annual meeting, to be attended by delegates from 135 nations, is scheduled to discuss the global, social, political and economic situation as well as issues relating to world peace and stability.

Mr. Srour affirmed that Arab delegations to the Seoul meeting are scheduled to hold a separate meeting previous to the conference in order to coordinate their position towards topics on the IPU's agenda.

He stated that he would deliver Jordan's address to the two meetings, outlining the Kingdom's position towards developments in the Middle East.

Woman stabbed to death in apparent honour crime

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A 19-year-old woman was allegedly stabbed to death by her older brother Monday for suspected adultery, according to official sources.

Hanan Abdul Karim was stabbed by her brother Mohammad, 22, in their family's home in the Alia neighbourhood of Amman, one official source said, adding that Mohammad turned himself in to the police shortly after the incident.

According to the source, the victim, who was married for one year, often quarrelled with her husband and recently returned to her family's house.

Shortly after that, the source maintained, a rumour ensued that the woman had an affair with another man.

"Her brother heard the rumour, lost his temper and stabbed her to cleanse his family's honour," the source said.

Preliminary autopsy results determined traces of a struggle on the woman's body and that she had 10 stab wounds on her chest, waist and stomach.

Police contacted by the Jordan Times Tuesday confirmed that a woman was killed but refused to release any details. Hanan became the seventh woman to be killed in a crime of honour since the beginning of the year.

She was also the third woman to be killed during the month of March in a crime of honour.

Last year, police reports said that 19 women were killed in similar crimes in the Kingdom.

Arab-American poet emphasises importance of literary identity

By Jeffrey Buckley and Tanya Hajjouna
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Visiting Arab-American poet Lisa Suhair Majaj yesterday concluded her speaking tour of West Bank and Jordanian universities.

Ms. Majaj arrived in the region last month to attend conferences directed towards Arab writers and to lecture on the developing identity of Arabs, through literature, in the United States.

The United States Information Service (USIS) invited Ms. Majaj, well-known in Arab literary circles in the U.S., to Amman to spark interest in Arab-American literature in English Departments here.

"Arab-American literature is rarely discussed in Jordan, and our students exhibited a strong interest in Ms. Majaj's talks," a USIS representative, who requested anonymity, said of a recent lecture at the Jordanian Women's University which about 60 students attended.

"We (Arabs) have a voice to be heard in America," a University of Jordan English Department head, Dr. Safadi, said in his introductory remarks.

English students who attended that lecture do not study Arab-American literature in particular but took time out of their regular classes to attend Ms. Majaj's presentation.

The basis of the talk stemmed from her idea that "you need to look back at where you come from to see where you are now." With this principle, Ms. Majaj explained how Arab Americans relate to their common pasts through memory.

By "memory," she means that Arabs can maintain

their identity in America by remembering practices of their ancestors. This does not necessarily mean that they must do exactly as their parents but that they should know that Arabs can claim a common history, according to Ms. Majaj.

As with many minority groups in America, Arabs are confronted with this quandary of identity, she said. "To be Arab is not to contradict being an American."

Throughout Ms. Majaj's talk, she specifically referred to Arab-American poets and samples of their writing. She writes in English, however, emphasises that poetry is intrinsic to Arab culture and that such writing is, indeed, an expression of identity.

The 1967 war marked a turning point for Arab Americans and affected their ideas accordingly, she explained. When Arab Americans observed the unity of the Arab World during this crisis, they were compelled to examine their own community. Early Arab-American writers tended to focus on assimilation into an "American" identity; it was not until the late 1960's that they initiated the development of an independent identity, Ms. Majaj affirmed.

She explained that the term "Arab-American" is relatively new as Arabs in the U.S. once identified themselves by their individual nationalities rather than the pan-Arab identity prevalent today.

Ms. Majaj, currently completing her dissertation at the University of Michigan, was raised in Amman and hopes to return to encourage more interest in Arab-American writing here.

What's Going On

GERMAN-AMERICAN FILM WEEK

*"The Great Sinner" (English) at the American Centre/Abdoun at 5:00 p.m.

CONCERT

* Piano concert by Gaswan Zarkly at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman at 8:00 p.m.

AMMAN THEATRE FESTIVAL

* Two Jordanian performances entitled "Hi Hu" by Fawanees Theatre and "Salem's Tale" by Hanouna Troupe respectively at 7:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. at the Royal Cultural Centre.

LECTURE

*"The Culture of the Moriscos in the Andalus in the Balance" by Dr. Mohammad Hatamleh at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman at 6:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* African ceramic arts exhibition at Al Bait Furniture Establishment premises, Mecca Street, until April 10.

* Artworks by Egyptian artist Jamil Shafiq entitled "Black and White" at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 687598), until April 10.

* Spring exhibition 1997 at Orfali Art Gallery, Umm Uttheina, until April 6.

* Works by Paris-based Syrian artist Ziad Daloul at Darat Al Fumun, Jabal Weibdeh, until April 3. Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists.

The Executive Secretary and staff of ESCWA regret to announce the sudden passing away of their colleague and friend

Dr. Ziad Kassem

on Monday 31 March 1997.

The burial will take place at Sahab Cemetery following the noon prayers at Aisha Mosque, Abdoun on Wednesday 2 April.

Condolences may be offered at the residence of the deceased located in Abdoun, Khalil Zaza Street, Building No. 39, two streets behind the Orthodox Church, for three days as of 2 April.

Our sincere condolences to his family and in particular to his wife, our colleague Ms. Fatima Sbeity Kassem.

May God bless his soul.

CDD records 10% increase in accidents last year

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Civil Defence Department (CDD) released 1996 accident figures which indicate that accident rates for that year increased by 10.56 per cent over the previous year.

The increase in population as well as rapid technological advancements were some of the main factors cited for the increase, according to the Director of the Department of Operations at the CDD Lieutenant Colonel Ahmad Rahahleh.

The CDD statistics indicated that 37,993 accidents occurred in the Kingdom in 1996, resulting in 951 deaths and injuries to 33,177 people, as compared to 34,364 accidents in 1995, accounting for 962 deaths

and 30,529 injuries.

The CDD official told the Jordan Times Tuesday that international studies indicate that 85 per cent of all accidents occur due to negligence, carelessness and ignorance of safety measures "which rings true in Jordan as well, according to our studies."

"Despite continuous awareness media campaigns, we still notice that people fail to follow our advice concerning safety procedures," Lt. Col. Rahahleh said.

He cited injuries in factories and other working sites as prime examples. "Although safety equipment and clothes are available in factories, employees do not make use of these safety facilities and prefer to work without them," he said.

Emergencies involving first aid were the greatest

burden to which the CDD responded in 1996. Lt. Col. Rahahleh stated, with a resultant 768 deaths and 32,048 injuries.

The CDD units attributed the greatest number of calls to illness or disease, with 19,258 calls resulting in 539 deaths.

Traffic accidents were also a high cause of mortality with 212 deaths and 3,409 casualties.

In terms of rescue operations, the main cause of calls were attributed to drowning with 73 incidents, resulting in 55 deaths and 26 injuries, followed by accidents attributed to the weather, resulting in nine deaths and 27 injuries.

Most of the drowning incidents occurred in dams to individuals who did not know how to swim.

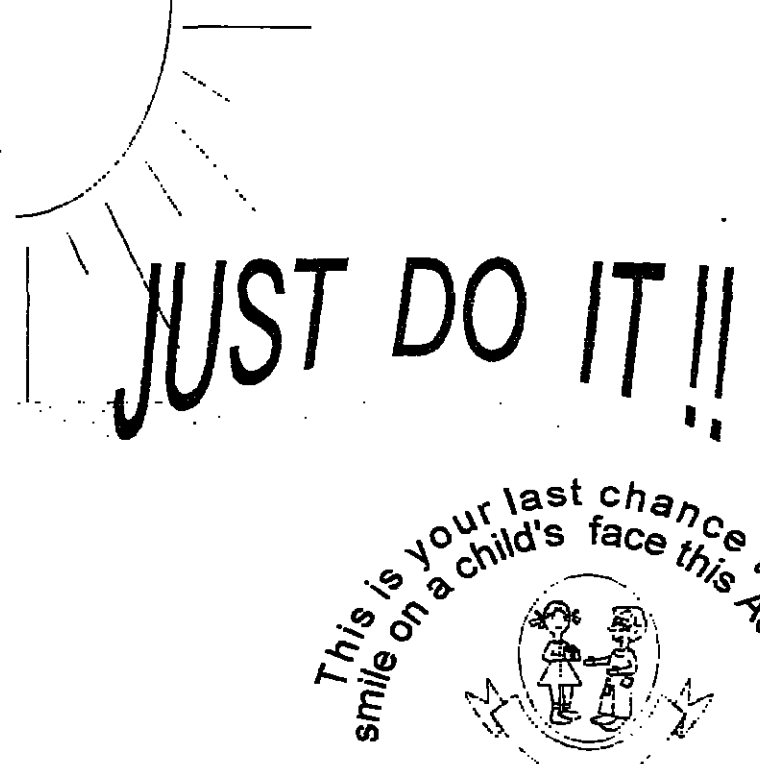
"All dams are protected by barbed wire and there

are also warning signs nearby," Lt. Col. Rahahleh affirmed. "However, people who do not know how to swim still climb over the wires and swim in these dams."

He added that a lack of public swimming pools and picnic facilities propel people to swim in dangerous areas.

Fires caused 26 deaths and 263 injuries, the CDD official said.

He maintained that fires often ignite through misuse of domestic gas and electric heaters; children playing with heating and electric devices; individuals leaving picnic areas without adequately extinguishing their fires; those who do not follow instructions nor maintain electric connections in good shape; and arson.



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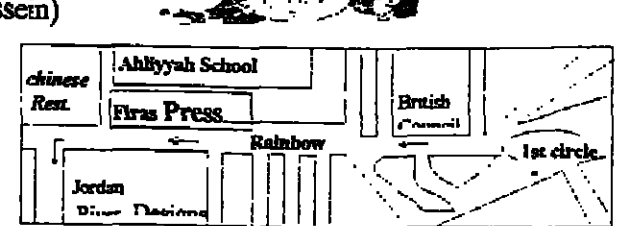
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- Iman Early Learning Center (Abdoun)
- Safeway
- Fakherdin Restaurant



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China warns U.S. not to interfere in Taiwan issue

BEIJING (R) — China Tuesday warned the United States not to interfere in Beijing's dealings with its island rival Taiwan, saying Washington should desist from large-scale high-technology weapons sales to Taipei.

Officials in Taiwan declined to comment on reports they were set to stiffen the island's already formidable defences by buying U.S. missiles and advanced helicopter gunships, but said they welcomed continued arms sales from the United States.

Exports of sophisticated U.S. weaponry were bolstering pro-independence sentiment in Taiwan and should be stopped, said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang.

"I hope that the United States will take the stance of not interfering in China's internal affairs on the Taiwan

issue, and even more that it will not make large sales of advanced weapons," Mr. Shen told a news briefing in Beijing.

Responding to recent remarks by visiting U.S. House of Representatives speaker Newt Gingrich that Washington would defend Taiwan from mainland attack, Mr. Shen said the island was a purely domestic matter.

"The issue of Taiwan between China and the United States is just one issue, that of non-interference in China's internal affairs," Mr. Shen said.

Beijing has considered Taiwan a rebel province since defeated nationalist forces fled there in 1949 and has vowed to invade the island if it ever declares formal independence.

White House officials have sought to play down remarks by Mr. Gingrich, who was quoted during a three-day visit

that ended Sunday as telling Chinese officials here that the United States would defend Taiwan against such an attack.

Washington has said it would be gravely concerned by any attack against newly-democratic Taipei and has not shirked from displays of military muscle on the island's behalf. When China carried out war games and missile tests off Taiwan in the run-up to the island's first presidential elections in March last year, Washington sent two aircraft carrier battlegroups to monitor the situation.

Differences over Taiwan have long been a major irritant to the sensitive Sino-U.S. relationship, already battered by disputes over human rights, copyright piracy and trade.

Local newspapers have reported that the United States has agreed to sell 54 AGM-84A Harpoon missiles and 21

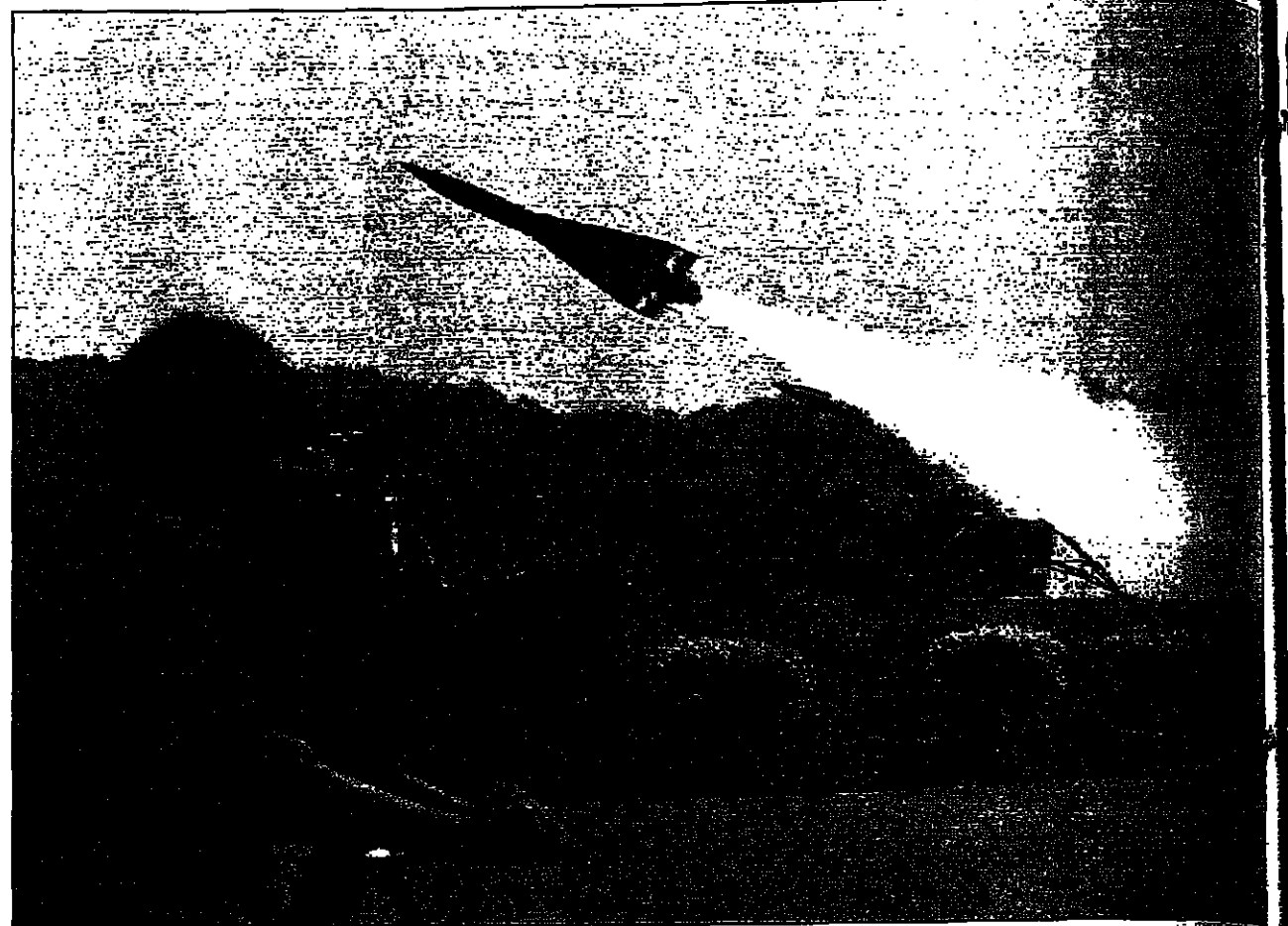
Super Cobra attack helicopters to Taiwan, a deal that would almost certainly further infuriate Beijing.

Officials of the island's military, which Tuesday fired two U.S. Hawk missiles offshore in a test seen as bolstering anti-China defences, declined to confirm the reports.

But Taiwan military spokesman Kung Fan-Ting said the island welcomed further arms sales from the U.S.

"Normally, we would not comment on any ongoing arms deal, but for any deal which can help increase our defence needs or maintain peace and stability in a region, we are pleased to have it struck," Mr. Kung said.

Arms shipments by Washington to Taiwan were supporting dreams of independence on the island and should not be repeated, said Chinese spokesman Shen.



A third-generation version of a U.S. Hawk missile is launched during a test firing from Tanshui Taiwan western coast Tuesday. It was the second test by Taiwan's military of the short-range ground-to-air missile at increasing Taiwan's defense capability in the face of military threats from rival China (Reuters photo).

Russia, Belarus wrangle over 'costly' union deal

MOSCOW (R) — Last-minute haggling between Russian and Belarussian officials over details of a document on a union between their two states continued on Tuesday amid signs that the Russian leadership could be beginning to get cold feet.

Government spokesman Igor Shabunov told a news conference the planned union between Russia and its western neighbour could be costly for Moscow and that the text of the document had not yet been finalised.

"(The agreement) means taking away some financial resources. To a certain extent it will make the finan-

cial situation in Russia more complicated," he said.

Russia would have to assess all political and economic aspects of the deal before making a final decision, he said.

President Boris Yeltsin had been due to sign the paper with his Belarussian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko on Wednesday. On Tuesday he dispatched security adviser Ivan Rybkin to Minsk with a personal message for Lukashenko.

The original draft, obtained by Reuters earlier this week, had been contradictory, insisting that the former Soviet republics would remain separate sovereign states but that union

decisions had to be obeyed.

It called for socially oriented market reforms — a dream to conservative hard-liners in Belarus but a nightmare for the young team trying to build a competitive market economy in Russia.

Kremlin sources said Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, appointed earlier this month to coordinate the economic reform programme, wanted to scrap the initial 17-page draft and replace it with a two-page declaration of intent.

But he faces tough opposition from more conservative ministers, some of whom see union with Belarus as a way to strengthen Russia

and boost its international standing.

"If everything goes all right, the treaty will be signed. It is of major significance," Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov told reporters in the Russian parliament on Tuesday.

"We are not talking about an immediate union of the two states, we are talking about speeding up the process of integration. The whole world is following this path, why should we and Belarus go in different directions?"

Liberals in Russia and in Belarus' nationalist opposition say the deal would hurt both countries' national interests and Western econo-

mists say it could be hard to integrate two totally different economic systems or to swap virtually worthless Belarus roubles for much more valuable Russian ones.

Russia has privatised much of its industry and is allowing managers to make their own decisions. The Belarussian economy is still strictly regimented, centrally controlled and largely state owned.

"Until Belarus goes through some privatisation, the economies are totally incompatible and will not be made compatible through political fiat," said Keith Darden, who is researching integration in the Commonwealth of

Independent States.

Russian newspapers said Yeltsin had not yet made a final decision on the union treaty, which lists ways in which the two former Soviet republics will cooperate and coordinate policy, but insists they will remain separate states.

The liberal newspaper Izvestia questioned the Kremlin's rush to promote the treaty without proper public debate.

"They are deciding the fate of Russia behind the backs of the people," it said in its lead article. "Was it agreement or conspiracy prepared in the corridors of power?"

Massive population displacement reported in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — More than 250,000 people have been uprooted from frontline areas in Afghanistan in the past five months, the United Nations refugee care agency said Tuesday.

To date 140,000 have moved into Kabul from areas north of the capital, the local office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) here said in a statement.

Another 50,000 were scattered in at least 12 locations in northern Afghanistan, mostly from the frontline provinces north of Kabul.

In addition 34,000 fled to the western city of Herat, controlled by the Taliban Islamic militia, from the "battles taking place in Badghis province" in north-western Afghanistan, the agency said.

Fighting in Badghis, where the Taliban mainly face the forces of northern warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, has "recently intensified," the statement added. Since October a further 50,000 Afghans have entered neighbouring Pakistan as refugees, although that movement has now dried up, the UNHCR said.

On average 800 people a day have been entering Kabul from the Shomali Valley, captured by the Taliban in January, through a UNHCR checkpoint to the north in the past three weeks, the agency said.

"The Shomali Valley is steadily bleeding its remaining inhabitants, which is a cause for considerable concern on a number of fronts," it said.

The displacement has badly affected the valley, a fertile plain 60 kilometres wide and 30 kilometres long, as an important source of food for Kabul.

Pakistani parliament gives Sharif all-powerful domestic role

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan's newly-elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif gained a towering role in national affairs as parliament Tuesday sharply slashed presidential powers through a unanimous historic vote.

Parliament annulled a 12-year-old discretionary authority which allowed the president to dissolve the elected government and the national assembly.

The authority has been used four times in the past eight years by successive presidents.

The legislation was passed by a bipartisan 79-0 vote in the 86-member senate and later carried 190-0 in the national assembly or lower house.

It also makes it obligatory for the president to honour the prime minister's advice in appointing superior judges, provincial governors and chiefs of the army, navy and air force.

President Farooq Ahmed Leghari, who used the revoked authority in November to fire Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and dissolve the national assembly, had given prior consent to the legislation, Mr. Sharif said.

Mr. Sharif, unveiling the decision in a televised address late Monday, said Mr. Leghari had "wholeheartedly" approved of the move which would "restore supremacy of the parliament" and ensure political stability.

The controversial clauses giving wide powers to the president were inserted into the constitution in 1985 under military ruler Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, about three years before his death in a plane crash.

But the parliamentary vote sparked speculation as to whether Mr. Sharif would retain, modify or disband a much-criticised Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS), set up by Mr. Leghari before the Feb. 3 elections.

The CDNS, a consultative body chaired by Mr. Leghari and comprising civilian leaders and top military brass, was set up to "advise and aid" the government on major strategic

and economic issues.

At the time Mr. Leghari and army Chief General Jehangir Karamat said the next government would be free to restructure or dissolve the CDNS, following wide criticism labelling it a mechanism to rein in future prime ministers.

Mr. Sharif is yet to spell out his plans on the fate of the CDNS, but a leader from his Pakistan Muslim League, Mohammad Ejaz-ul-Haq, son of the late military ruler, proposed that the role of the council be made more effective.

A system of checks and balances should continue, Mr. Ejaz-ul-Haq told reporters, while welcoming the "restoration of the authority of parlia-

ment."

By enhancing the role of the CDNS a balance could be maintained to "avoid any untoward situation," he said, referring to past political crises which have led to the ouster of elected governments.

Mr. Ejaz-ul-Haq said the CDNS could play a "productive" role at times of any constitutional crises.

Analysts said Mr. Leghari, whose tenure runs until the end of 1998, and the powerful military, appear to favour a free hand for Mr. Sharif in his crusade to revive a shattered economy and his diplomatic offensive to improve ties with rival India.

Spanish train disaster kills 19, injures 89

PAMPLONA, Spain (R) — Spanish authorities said Tuesday 19 people were killed when a crowded passenger train was derailed near the city of Pamplona in northern Navarre province.

Officials said earlier 21 people had been killed in Spain's worst train disaster in nearly two decades. But they revised the figure after further examination of the mangled remains of the victims.

Navarre regional government President Miguel Sanz ruled out sabotage in Monday night's derailment in the village of Huarte Araquil. A spokesman for Spanish railway company RENFE said an investigation was under way.

Eighty-nine people were injured in the disaster, 18 of them seriously. Passengers trapped inside the wreckage screamed for help.

"Some bodies were completely destroyed, so it is very difficult to identify them," said Mr. Sanz.

RENFE said the five victims identified so far were Spaniards.

The train, carrying 248 passengers, was travelling from Barcelona to Irun on Spain's border with France when three of its four carriages came off the track

and overturned in Huarte Araquil, about 32 kilometres northwest of Pamplona.

There were moments of sheer terror in the overturned carriages as passengers, many returning home from a long holiday weekend, struggled to crawl out from beneath piles of glass, baggage and broken seats.

"The people inside were screaming. It was horrifying," one woman passenger told reporters.

Dozens of ambulances rushed to the scene from surrounding towns and survivors were pulled free.

A spokesman for the Navarre regional government confirmed there were 21 dead and 89 injured. The injured were taken to half a dozen hospitals in Navarre province.

Outside a Pamplona hospital, a mother wailed with grief and collapsed in the arms of relatives after being told her 23-year-old son had died in the derailment. "My son my son" she cried.

There were so many injured to attend to that emergency crews had to leave many of the bodies alongside the tracks draped in blankets. A makeshift morgue was set up in a nearby park.

Retreating Zaire soldiers disarmed in Lubumbashi

LUBUMBASHI, Zaire (R) — Government soldiers fleeing advancing rebels arrived in Zaire's second city of Lubumbashi, but were disarmed by military police to prevent looting, expatriate sources said on Tuesday.

Some 120 soldiers who abandoned the rail and military town of Kamina on Sunday seized a train to take them on the 24-hour journey to Lubumbashi, the hub of Zaire's copper industry in southern Shaba province.

The city is the immediate target of rebels who took up arms last October to topple President Mobutu Sese Seko, in power since 1965. Rebels now hold a quarter of Zaire, which is the size of western Europe.

The retreating soldiers entered Lubumbashi in the same disorderly fashion they have done in other cities before abandoning them to rebels advancing steadily from the east.

"They didn't respect any of the normal traffic rules," said one irate expatriate, surprised at how quickly the train of soldiers, and another carrying 18 fleeing officers, had reached the province's capital 600 kilo-

metres away. There is little but bush and a few small trading or mining towns on the way.

Military police, about the only remaining force in the area with full uniforms, were waiting for them at Lubumbashi's elegant colonial railway station when they arrived and cordially disarmed them without resistance, the sources said.

The fall of Kamina, which effectively cuts Lubumbashi from the rest of government-held Zaire and traps soldiers on one side of the rebel lines, failed to cause much concern in the city whose main goal is to survive the civil war unscathed.

"Our soldiers just ran away without a fight," said waiter Kaizer Nzenga, with hoots of laughter. People in Shaba, which has fought several times to secede from Zaire, say rebel leader Laurent Kabila is a saviour whose arrival they long for.

Their main fear is looting by retreating soldiers, who last ransacked the town in 1991 in a pay dispute.

"The boys who only earn about a dollar or two a month, they want to loot. It has almost become a habit,"

said Frances Mwepu, a student.

There is little sign in Lubumbashi of any attempt to mount a credible defence of the town, whose streets are full of talk that the army is melting away as the rebels approach.

"I'm meant to be defending the airport but of course I'm not going to fight," said one soldier in town.

Rebels or local sympathisers are only 220 kilometres away in the small town of Kasenga on the Zambian border. Expatriate sources said an army attempt to retake the town this week had failed.

The biggest concern in Lubumbashi on Tuesday was that peace talks between the rebels and the Kinshasa authorities, due this weekend in South Africa, might delay the advance.

"They really should come as soon as possible and not delay," said Mr. Nzenga.

Mr. Mobutu was away in Europe for cancer treatment for most of the time since the rebellion erupted. After months of tough talking, he yielded to battlefield pressure and agreed to negotiations with the rebels.

NEWS IN BRIEF

10,000 Kenyans homeless after fire

NAIROBI (R) — Fire swept through a Mombasa slum over the weekend, destroying the homes of 10,000 people, Kenyan television reported on Monday evening. The report, monitored by the BBC, did not mention any deaths or injuries in the Sunday night blaze in Kisimani slums of the Indian Ocean port's Kisumu Division. It said thousands of homeless people were camping in churches and mosques and appealing to the government for assistance.

Bangladesh PM offers talks with opposition

DHAKA (R) — Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a bid to defuse simmering political tension, has offered to hold talks with her main political foe and predecessor, Begum Khaleda Zia, Hasina's aides said on Tuesday. They said the prime minister made the offer while she was speaking to editors of local newspapers and news agencies at her office on Monday night. "I am ready to sit with the opposition leaders to discuss any issue of national importance," Ms. Hasina said. Ms. Hasina, who took office in June last year after her Awami League defeated Khaleda's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the general election, said she was ready for a live debate on television with the opposition leader on all issues.

Former N.Y. Blood Centre worker arrested

NEW YORK (R) — A former assistant manager in the viral testing laboratory of the New York Blood Centre, the nation's biggest independent supplier of blood, was arrested on Monday for allegedly manipulating testing for viruses such as HIV and hepatitis. Eliazar Maniago, 36, of Bergenfield, New Jersey, was charged in a criminal complaint filed by prosecutors in Manhattan Federal Court. The New York Blood Centre (NYBC) provides 80 per cent of the blood supply in the New York area. It also provides blood donor testing services for facilities located in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Tennessee and imports and exports blood products to and from Europe. The complaint alleges that from 1993 to about November 1996 Maniago manipulated the testing of blood for such viruses as HIV, which causes AIDS, and hepatitis.

Policemen arrested after TV film shows killing

BRASILIA (R) — A group of Brazilian military police officers was arrested on Monday after Globo Television aired amateur video footage allegedly showing Sao Paulo police killing a civilian, extorting money and beating motorists with batons. The film, taken over several nights in the suburbs of Greater Sao Paulo, allegedly shows military police setting up a roadblock ostensibly to check identity papers and car documents in a hunt for drug traffickers. The leader of the operation, identified by Globo through his nickname "Rambo," was shown hitting drivers and passengers of stopped cars with his baton and strolling around with a gun in his hand. One man was beaten and taken behind a wall. A few minutes later, a shot was heard. It was not clear if the man was killed.

Toxic gas cloud kills three in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR (R) — A toxic gas cloud released by accident at a detergent factory in western El Salvador killed at least three people and injured more on Monday, police said. A truck ran into a chemical tank at the factory, releasing the cloud that killed the driver and two minors, police said. "A large number of people have arrived. We are unable to look after them all," said an employee at the San Juan de Dios de Sonsonate Hospital, about 65 kilometres from the capital. The Red Cross said it was sending reinforcements to help aid the victims.

Gas leak at Singapore refinery kills one

SINGAPORE (R) — A gas leak killed one man and injured six at the Mobil Corp Refinery in Singapore, the company said Tuesday. The refinery has been shut down for scheduled maintenance since March 15. The work was due to last up to six weeks. The Singapore Civil Defence Force said it suspected Monday's gas leak was hydrogen sulphide from a pipe at an aromatics plant at the refinery in western Singapore. "Mobil personnel and contractors were carrying out maintenance work at a unit in the aromatics complex when they were overcome by fumes," a Mobil spokesman said.

S. Lanka navy destroys Tiger boat killing 5

COLOMBO (AFP) — At least five Tiger guerrillas were killed when a navy boat destroyed a Tamil rebel boat off Sri Lanka's north-eastern coast Tuesday, officials said. The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) craft was detected near the coast of Kokkila just after midnight, they said. "The boat exploded after it was hit by a Dvora gun boat," a local official said adding that there were five rebels aboard the twin-engine craft. Last week, the navy sank a flotilla of Tiger boats in the same area and said that up to 100 rebels were killed in the attack. The LTTE, however, said only five cadres were killed.



AUSTRALIAN TOWER: Steeplejacks on Monday celebrate the completion of electrical and construction work on Auckland's Sky Tower, part of the Harrah's Sky City casino complex. The casino, hotel and conference centre, at a height of 328 meters, is Australia's highest structure and will be opened in July (Reuters photo)

India's Congress to accept anyone but Deve Gowda

NEW DELHI (R) — India's Congress Party said on Tuesday it was prepared to accept another candidate from the ruling United Front Alliance to replace Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda.

"I am not against any member of the steering committee (of the United Front). My only complaint is against Deve Gowda," Congress President Sitaram Kesri said in a television interview two days after declaring himself a candidate for the top job.

The Hong Kong-based Star TV's mainly Indian news programme quoted Kesri as hinting he would accept G.K. Moopanar, head of the Tamil Maanila Congress, a key constituent of the United Front, as the next prime minister.

Kesri, in a bombshell announcement Sunday, told a news conference that the Congress had withdrawn its make-or-break support for Deve Gowda because of his alleged failure to fight communalism.

The allusion was to recent electoral successes of the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the expense of the Congress. "I am not talking about politics. It is a fight of ideologies," Kesri said.

President Shankar Dayal Sharma on Monday asked Deve Gowda to seek a vote of confidence in parliament by April 11, raising the prospects of an almost certain defeat for his 10-month old government unless the Congress changes its mind.

Momentum slows in search for solution to Peru hostage crisis

LIMA (R) — Pre-Easter optimism had all but vanished Monday as Marxist rebels accused Peru's government of dragging its feet in talks toward a negotiated solution in the 104-day hostage crisis.

"The slowness is due to the government's intransigence," charged "Comrade Alejandro," a Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) military leader in Peru's eastern jungle.

The MRTA's demand for the release of jailed comrades has been the main sticking point since 20-odd rebels led by Nestor Cerna blasted their way into the Japanese ambassador's residence during a cocktail party on Dec. 17.

Diplomatic and media circles were convinced last week the government and MRTA were close to an agreement involving asylum in Cuba for the hostage-takers, a possible ransom deal and the release of some lower-level prisoners.

Tight security kept on Rangoon after unrest

RANGOON (AFP) — Security remained high around mosques and some Buddhist monasteries here Tuesday, although the situation was calm after religious unrest, residents said.

Muslims were on guard inside mosques in downtown Rangoon and government security forces remained posted outside mosques and monasteries, but no further attacks were reported Monday.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew continued in the northern city of Mandalay, where the attacks on mosques and

Muslim property began more than two weeks ago in apparent retribution for an alleged sexual assault on a Buddhist girl.

There was a report of fresh unrest in Sitwe in the Arakan state bordering Bangladesh, but this could not be confirmed. With a high Muslim population, the state has historically been a hotbed of religious tension.

Sitwe, Mandalay and Rangoon are three of the five cities reportedly put under a first degree security alert by authorities to prevent troubles spreading.

Residents in Rangoon said Buddhist monks who believed they have been made scapegoats for the troubles remained restless. There were suspicions that people outside the monasteries had been donning robes and provoking the unrest.

Security is stiffest around monasteries in close proximity to mosques. Some monasteries are preventing young monks from leaving at night, they said.

The Burmese government has cancelled its monthly press briefing for foreign

journalists "due to unforeseen circumstances" — widely believed to be concern over the anti-Muslim tensions.

The junta has blamed the unrest on unnamed political agitators seeking to destabilise the country and sabotage its likely entry into the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) later this year.

ASEAN consists of three predominantly Islamic countries — Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia — as well as the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

France sees no tragedy if U.N. moves out of U.S.

UNITED NATIONS (R) — A French diplomat said Monday it would not be a tragedy if the United Nations moved to another country, and castigated New York City's mass transit system as a disaster.

The legal adviser of France's U.N. Mission, Hubert Legal, was addressing a U.N. committee the day before the start of a new city programme under which diplomats would no longer be exempt from paying parking fines.

At the same time, each diplomatic mission would be guaranteed two parking spaces and one space outside the home of each ambassador, while a special police "hot line" would be set up so that any unauthorised vehicles using those spots could be towed away.

But some elements of the plan have been challenged by the U.N. legal counsel, Under-Secretary-General Hans Corell of Sweden, as being contrary to international law.

These include a provision under which diplomatic vehicles whose parking fines remain unpaid for a year would be deprived of their diplomatic license plates.

Legal, the French representative on the 15-member committee on relations with the host country, said: "Were the United States to feel that it is impossible under current

conditions to play host to diplomatic functions under appropriate conditions, well then I would put it this way — it would not be a tragedy, there are other possibilities.

"New York is not the only place to put the United Nations. There is Geneva, there is Vienna and other places. Nothing would stand in the way of this organisation transferring a more important

'Washington wants cuts in specialised U.N. agencies'

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan Monday that Washington would request budget cuts in specialised U.N. agencies, according to diplomats. No information was available as to the size of the budget cuts or which U.N. agencies were targeted. Annan said the cuts could put the United States on "a collision course" with other U.N. members, particularly Third World countries, according to Annan spokesman Fred Eckhard. U.N. reform dominated Albright's meeting with Annan, Eckhard said. Washington owes the United Nations \$1.6 billion, Eckhard said. But Congress and the White House say the figure is below \$1 billion.

portion of what it does to either Geneva or Vienna, for instance," he said.

Legal noted that nothing in the U.N. Charter required the General Assembly or the Security Council to meet in New York.

He said Geneva and Vienna had "a great deal of tradition, culture and civilisation to offer, where the exercise of diplomatic functions is respected and where the kinds of problems you run into here simply isn't encountered."

In those cities, when diplomatic missions celebrated their national days the local police were on hand to ensure everything went smoothly. But in New York, it was "quite the opposite," with police showing up "to issue tickets, systematically so, as soon as vehicles show up."

Dismissing any suggestion that diplomats might rely on New York's public transport system, Legal said it was "disastrously poor in quality, the New York subway being a blot on the ... city."

Italy defends navy, presses on with Albania force

ROME (R) — Italy denied Tuesday that its navy had rammed a boat crowded with Albanian refugees and said the sinking would not alter its plans to lead a multinational security force to the troubled Balkan country.

Defence Minister Beniamino Andreatta told parliament he had invited Albanian navy experts to join investigations into last Friday's disaster, in which Tirana says at least 83 people drowned, and promised a full and open inquiry.

But he dismissed claims in some newspapers and from some sources in Albania that the collision in the Adriatic happened because the corvette Sibilla bore down on the refugee boat, which had set out for Italy from the rebel-held port of Vlore.

"It is absolutely shameful

even to think that the Italian vessel had the deliberate intention of ramming the Albanian boat," Mr. Andreatta told a joint session of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Commissions of the Senate (Upper House).

He said the boat had been badly overcrowded and had swung abruptly into the path of the Sibilla when the corvette moved alongside to order it to return to Albania.

The sinking entailed the first known loss of life since Italy began controversial naval interdiction patrols late last month after some 13,000 Albanians fled to Italian shores in an uncontrolled exodus from their country's armed upheaval.

It has cast a cloud over preparations by Italy to lead a security force to protect a humanitarian

relief mission to Albania, rocked by an uprising that has put rebels and lawless gunmen in control of towns throughout the south.

Prime Minister Romano Prodi reaffirmed Tuesday that the sinking would not stop Italy from proceeding with the force despite threats to the safety of Italian soldiers expressed in Vlore and rumblings of political opposition at home.

"The Albanian people know that Italy is an indispensable partner in rebuilding their own country," he told La Stampa newspaper. "I know that the Albanians expect concrete help from us and we will give it to them," he said.

Mr. Andreatta said he would meet Albanian Defence Minister Shagrir Vukaj in Rome later Tuesday

to discuss the sinking.

The talks will also focus on plans for the security force deployment ahead of a meeting in the Italian capital Wednesday of senior defence officials from countries that have said they are ready to contribute men.

Mr. Andreatta said the force, expected to secure the ports of Durres and Vlore as well as Tirana airport for foreign aid deliveries, would consist of 4,000 to 6,000 men.

He said France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Denmark and Sweden had all expressed a willingness to contribute.

The force, the bulk of it Italian, received United Nations Security Council approval last Friday and was given the go ahead by the

Albanian parliament Sunday.

"Lack of prudence by public opinion and the press about the sinking has certainly aggravated the risks for the mission. That has meant committing more men and taking additional precautions," Mr. Andreatta said.

The Italian Navy rescued 34 people in Friday's shipwreck and recovered four bodies. Albanian authorities said after talking to survivors that at least 79 more people were missing, most of them crammed below decks when the boat capsized and sank.

Mr. Andreatta said the aged coastal patrol craft had been stolen from the port of Sarande by "criminals" on March 26 and suggested it was crewed by unqualified seamen running an illegal emigration racket.

Britain to trade Northern Ireland for Hong Kong — just kidding

TOKYO (Agencies) — Before reading any further, remember, Tuesday was April fool's day.

Ready? Okay then, here it is:

In a stunning reversal of policy, China has been secretly negotiating with Great Britain to allow Hong Kong to remain a British colony in exchange for ceding to Beijing Northern Ireland and Gibraltar, a report said Tuesday.

The source — the Asian Wall Street Journal's Asian edition.

The story was part of a carefully crafted parody of the respected Wall Street Journal's Asian edition.

Replete with the journal's trademark dot-drawings (all miscaptioned) and done in its conservative layout style, the eight-page parody, seen in Tokyo and Hong Kong, featured such other "spoofs" as:

— Plans by Disney to build a theme park in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

— The 2002 winter Olympics going not to Salt Lake City but to Burma because of a typo (the Salt Lake Organizing Committee is SLOC, Burma's ruling junta is SLORC).

— "Noted American impresario" Newt Gingrich's visit to Indonesia.

And several articles not fit for further mention.

In one report, it said China claimed sovereignty over territorial waters extending all the way across the Pacific into San Francisco Bay, on evidence dating from the "Spam" dynasty.

Readers were also given the inside story to flights on Singapore Airlines, one of the world's most profitable carriers.

Passengers who made advances on stewardesses or who were found chewing gum were strapped to duty-free carts and

caned, while those found with drugs were hanged along the aisle as a spoof on the island-state's tough laws.

The prank, which caused mirth in many Hong Kong newsrooms, kept phones ringing all day at the Asian Wall Street Journal, the serious-minded, small-print broadsheet newspaper that the spoof was cloned to resemble.

"No, I have no idea where it came from. But it certainly didn't have anything to do with us," the real journal's editor Urban Lehner said.

"There were some funny bits in it," he said. "But there were also some parts that I thought didn't really work. It was a mixed bag."

Manila says might shelter N. Korean defector for month

MANILA (R) — The Philippines said Tuesday it was considering allowing top North Korean defector Hwang Jang-Yup to stay in the country for a month.

Foreign Secretary Domingo Siason said the government was holding talks with Chinese and South Korean officials on the length of Hwang's stay in the Philippines and that Manila might not announce Hwang's departure until after the fact.

Pyongyang's former top ideologue has been in a secret hideaway in the Philippines since China spirited him into this country on March 18, nearly five weeks after Hwang defected to the South Korean consulate in Beijing.

Seoul and Beijing had agreed that the Philippines should serve as a third country transit point before Hwang, 73, is flown to South Korea, where he is expected to seek political asylum.

The Philippine detour is widely seen as intended to spare North Korea the indignity of having Hwang head straight for its bitter rival, South Korea.

"I think the Republic of Korea has given a commitment to China that they would agree to 30 days," Siason told reporters before attending a cabinet meeting chaired by President Fidel Ramos.

Asked if this was acceptable to Manila, Siason said: "That is still being considered ... We are in the process of considering 30 days, yes."

Ramos declared shortly after the North Korean arrived that he would be allowed to remain for "as long as necessary and as short as possible."

The government has maintained an official news blackout on Hwang's location. Fears have been raised that Hwang, the most senior North Korean to defect, might be a target for Pyongyang hitmen.

"I don't deal with details," Siason said, when pressed on Hwang's whereabouts. "Fortunately, so I can look straight into your eyes and say I don't know where he is."

Since Hwang's arrival, immigration officials have been on alert at airports and seaports around the country against the possible entry of any suspected North Korean assassins who might try to harm Seoul's prize diplomatic catch.

Asked if Hwang's continued stay might prove an embarrassment to Manila because of the danger that he might be assassinated, Siason said: "Did anyone tell you that he would be killed here?"

He indicated that Hwang remained safe in his hideaway.

"If there were something strange, they will report that to me. If everything is normal, I am not informed," he said.

Hwang has been variously reported to be under military protective custody in the mountain city of Baguio, at the former U.S. Clark Airbase, now an industrial complex, at the Subic Bay freeport and in Manila. But searches by dozens of Filipino, Japanese and South Korean journalists failed to yield any sign of him.

Spring blizzard batters northeast U.S., kills one

BOSTON (R) — A spring storm lashed the U.S. East Coast Monday, pummeling residents from Maine to Maryland with snow, rain, hail, and howling wind and leaving one dead and thousands without power.

More than 18 inches (45 cm) of wet snow fell in New York State, where the death of a 36-year-old man in a Catskill mountain region traffic accident was blamed on the storm.

Further south in Sussex County, New Jersey, more than a foot (34 cm) of snow blanketed the region and a painful mix of sleet, rain and snow pummeled New York City and Long Island as the storm slowly lumbered east toward the Atlantic.

Philadelphia reported 8 inches (20 cm) of snow and it continued to snow into the night in Wilmington, Delaware, and Baltimore, Maryland.

Power outages plagued New England as the National Weather Service recorded winds of 65 mph (105 km) off the coast of Massachusetts.

Northeast utilities reported 14,000 customers without power in Connecticut and another 4,000 without power in western Massachusetts. Boston Edison said some 2,000 of its customers without power.

Public service of New Hampshire also reported some 1,000 customers without power. Spokesmen for all three utilities said they expected the number of outages to grow as the storm continued to pummel the region with heavy, wet snow bringing down powerlines.

Many schools in the region, which had closed early Monday, said they would cancel classes Tuesday as well as the storm showed no signs of abating.

Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York State police reported dozens of traffic accidents due to the severe weather.

"Cars are all over the place and there are lots of accidents," trooper Andrew Lindeman said. "The interstates are a mess and I am sure the back roads are too."

Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut closed and Boston's Logan International Airport reported flight delays of up to an hour. Many airlines cancelled flights altogether, said a spokeswoman for Massport, which operates Logan.

Marine storm warnings were also in effect from Long Island to the Gulf of Maine as the weather service expected wind gusts to reach near hurricane force at times offshore.

Jordan Times

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King's message of peace

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein's talks with American leaders this time around assume an added significance in view of the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories, the coming to power of the new Clinton administration and the seemingly stable but otherwise volatile state of affairs of the wider Middle East region.

On the Palestinian-Israeli track, the nucleus of the whole Arab-Israeli peace, the prospects for an escape from the present logjam seem to become more remote by the day. Violence is escalating. The Israelis and the Palestinians are both entrenched in their positions and there are no signs that U.S. brokering is taking them anywhere.

Elsewhere in the region, prospects for the resumption of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese track seem to be nonexistent. The plight of the Iraqi people continues. The regions of the Middle East and North Africa, from Afghanistan in the east to Algeria in the west, are in turmoil.

In Washington, the new Clinton administration, which inherited the doctrine of the compatibility of oil, security and peace — especially for Israel — is in the process of reviewing that policy guideline. Whether they'll do that any sooner though remains to be seen.

For these reasons, President Clinton reaffirms on each occasion he receives the King that he draws on the Monarch's good advice, being a veteran Middle Eastern leader who is fully involved in and committed to the search for a comprehensive and lasting peace. The King will of course not spare his good counsel. The King will certainly tell the president that for peace to hold it must be equitable and just and address the grievances and aspirations of the Palestinian people. Jerusalem should not be a point of contention and division but a unifying factor, the King will tell the president as he told his audience on Tuesday in New York. Jerusalem cannot be the capital of Israel alone; it is the capital of the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and Arabs and Israelis.

The King will also tell the president and his aides that for the region to stabilise and to head towards peace the aspirations and fears of all peoples and governments, including Iraq and Iran, must be addressed. New formulas need to be worked out to bring peoples together and to pacify those who harbour aggression. In this vein Iraq cannot continue to be the pariah of the region. It should be rehabilitated and again returned to the region's community of states.

Last but not least the King wants to brief the president and his aides on the needs of a Jordan that is no longer at war with any of its neighbours: a Jordan that strives to be a moderating factor, and a modernised country. And the King, and the Jordanian people at large expect the president to listen, understand and sympathise with the King's vision for a Middle East at peace with itself and at peace with the world.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AS A direct result of the Arab League Council's resolutions, countries like Oman and Qatar are expected to stop contacts with Israel over projects like desalination of sea water and gas exports, because the Arabs have decided to freeze their normalisation with the Jewish state, said Mahmoud Rimawi, a writer for Al Ra'i daily. Countries like Jordan and Egypt, which have already signed peace treaties with Israel, are also expected to take measures to curtail contacts with Israel and restrict travel between the two sides, said the writer. Indeed, he said, the Arab League's decisions constitute a follow-up to the June 1996 Arab summit meeting in Cairo which decided that no normalisation with Israel can be achieved as long as Israel is maintaining its illegal practices and disregarding the requirements of peace. Israel should realise that the tension in relations with Egypt and Jordan, as witnessed in the past few weeks, on the one hand, and the Gulf states' determination to freeze the normalisation process, on the other, are clear signs of the Arab Nation's total rejection of Israel's policies and that only when Israel abides by the requirements of just peace can the peace process move ahead.

A WRITER for Al Dustour bitterly criticised that stringent orders issued by the Taliban movement which now rules Kabul requiring all Muslim males to grow their beards and to punish those who try to trim them. Orabi Rintawi also criticised the order to close all girls' schools and deprive women of education, among other measures which, the writer said, tend to take the country back to the dark ages and away from the true Muslim faith. By issuing such orders and applying such measures, the new rulers in Kabul are providing the enemies of Islam with material for anti-Islam propaganda while Afghanistan rapidly sinks in darkness. The writer said that with such backward rulers, the enemies of Islam will need not look far for excuses to fight the Islamic faith.

The Washington Watch

Arab Americans' meeting with Secretary Albright — 'an important first step'

By Dr. James Zogby

ARAB AMERICANS presented a unified front to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in a March 27 meeting. The meeting, which took place at the invitation of the Department of State, provided an opportunity for the secretary and the community to engage in a first-time dialogue.

The ten Arab American leaders in attendance had coordinated their presentation and positions prior to the meeting. In fact, in order to ensure that there was broad community support for our effort, we engaged Arab American leaders across the U.S. in meetings, conference calls and personal discussions in order to develop a position paper reflecting Arab American concerns with the peace process.

The position paper that grew out of these discussions presented an evaluation of the difficulties being experienced on the Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the peace process and recommendations to the secretary which we felt would help save the process from collapse.

The final document submitted to the secretary was endorsed by Arab American leaders of 52 organisations nationwide. It also framed the basis for much of our discussion with the secretary.

With regard to the Palestinian track, we expressed to Ms. Albright our grave concerns that the process was in imminent danger of collapse, primarily due to the Israeli decision to move forward with the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement. The refusal of the Likud government to honour agreements reached between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership and their penchant for acting unilaterally to impose their

will by force had eroded Palestinian confidence in the negotiating process. While we acknowledged the U.S. had made to advance the Palestinian position in the negotiations, we noted that the two U.S. vetoes in the United Nations had seriously damaged Palestinian and Arab confidence in the U.S. role.

"The refusal of the Likud government to honour agreements reached between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership and their penchant for acting unilaterally to impose their will by force had eroded Palestinian confidence in the negotiating process."

It was our view, expressed to the secretary, that unless the U.S. moved forcefully to convince the Israelis to stop the settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim, the process would not move forward.

In that regard, we told Ms. Albright that the Dennis Ross mission would only succeed if he applied balanced pressure. To openly pressure Palestinian President Yasser Arafat based on "perceptions" while not applying pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his real violations of the peace process would doom the process and further compromise the U.S. role.

The wound of Jabal Abu Ghneim must be closed and the crippling blockade against the Palestinians must be ended. On the Syrian track, we were unanimous in asserting that the U.S. should not forsake high level and bilateral talks with the

Syrian government. The Syrian track is critical for peace in the Middle East.

In that context, we told the secretary that it was our view that the U.S. should insist that the Israeli-Syrian talks be restarted at the point where they left off, with the U.S. affirming its commitment to the progress that had been made in the negotiations

even deeper erosion of the peace effort. In all the debates that ensued as to whether President Arafat issued a "green light" for the bombing and must now issue a "red light", it does not appear that the administration agrees with the Israeli assessment that Arafat gave a "green light" but only that there is the perception that there has now been created that there was such a signal.

In any case, we noted that since the Palestinian leadership has condemned the act, both wrong and tragic, the burden of taking steps to rescue the peace process now should not be shifted, even partly, onto its shoulders. It belongs squarely on the shoulders of the Israeli government and its heavy handed behaviour. We concluded by urging Secretary Albright to re-examine the U.S. position regarding the Netanyahu government and its violations of the peace and to play a more aggressive role in moving the process forward on the basis of agreements reached to date. At stake, we insisted, were not only Israeli and Arab concerns, but significant U.S. national security interests as well.

Secretary Albright indicated that this would be the first of many meetings and, in fact, suggested that we should meet again to evaluate the situation following ambassador Ross' assessment of the situation in the region.

It was a useful meeting with a secretary who was most engaging and eager to hear and learn and develop a dialogue. This fact, and the fact that the Arab Americans presented a unified and positive position of consensus, made the meeting an important first step.

It was the view of many of the Arab American leaders who were present at the meeting that many in the administration are concerned that this bombing has further compounded the situation and led to

LETTERS

Towards an independent state of Palestine

To the Editor:

ISRAEL CLAIMS it wants security. The United States echoes this. The Palestinians want self-determination. All claim they want peace.

There is one direct way all can have what they want: by creating an independent Palestinian state, as recognised by international law.

An independent Palestinian state should, first, have clear borders. A delineated "border" already exists. This, including all East Jerusalem, should be clearly marked, and sealed with a legal accord.

Second, Palestine as a state would have all the international rights and responsibilities of an independent state under international law. This includes the right to run its internal affairs without external interference or tutelage and to have defensive (only) armed forces to protect its sovereign territory. No foreign troops would be allowed in Palestine without the latter's express permission.

Third, to "ensure" Israeli security, an international peace/security force should be organised under UN auspices and funded by it. This "U.N. peacekeeping force for Palestine" would patrol a one-kilometre wide strip inside the borders of Palestine. It would have the right to arrest, subdue or shoot anyone carrying arms, explosives, etc. within that strip. It would cooperate with Palestinian security forces, who would be outside the strip. Its initial term would be five years, with the possibility of extension.

The funding should come from the arrears that the United States owes the U.N. (estimated about \$1.5 billion). The peacekeeping force would be staffed by units of U.N. nations — excluding Palestine, Israel and the U.S. (who is an unequivocal partisan of Israel).

Fourth, the question of Jewish "settlers" within Palestine should be solved by, say, allowing them to stay initially as is. But within six months they would have to decide whether or not they wished to stay on. If they wish to stay, they would have to become Palestinian citizens — with no right to have dual citizenship in Israel or any other country (such as the U.S.). If they leave, the Palestinian state would pay them compensation. This compensation would be calculated on the basis of the price Israel paid for the land and/or house that was "seized/expropriated" from Palestinians to make way for the Israeli/Jewish settler.

Additional funds would be given from the money that Israel would have to pay for compensation for Palestinian properties seized since 1948. Any state interested in Middle East peace could pay into a special compensation fund for this purpose, which would be set up under U.N. auspices.

A comprehensive Middle East peace treaty would be negotiated after the state of Palestine had been set up and recognised internationally. Of course, Palestine would be one of the parties to the negotiations. The negotiations, and final treaty, would also be done under U.N. aegis.

This is clearly a "win-win" solution all

around.

With an independent Palestinian state, Palestinians would lose the main — and only — source of powerful grievance. So, the impetus and rationale for violence towards Israel would disappear. With the United Nations peacekeeping force patrolling just inside Palestinian borders, it would lessen the probability of terrorist attacks. Israel can patrol its side of the border and, for practical purposes, completely seal it since now Palestine can open its border to Jordan. This should give Israel virtually complete security.

These solutions should be acceptable to all unless, of course, the Israelis have a real hidden agenda and the continual call for "security" for Israel is simply a smoke screen. This agenda, based on realistic suppositions, could be the elimination of Palestine, seizure of its land and the elimination of Palestinians from Palestine. But the Palestinians might as well become aware that, at this stage, they still have some land left.

So they should declare that they intend to be an independent state and stay so.

Of course, Israel may not recognise this fact, nor the U.S. for that matter. But for how long must the Middle East nations, and others interested in peace, be forced to follow the dictates of these two imperial nations who also claim to support the U.N. Charter?

Dr. Hendrik S. Weiler.

Being kind to God's creatures

To the Editor:

I WAS shocked reading Jo Molloy's letter "Appalling cruelty" (Jordan Times, March 29, 1997) and I believe that many other people felt the same, even if one were to believe that this was a single incident.

It is sad to hear about indiscriminate dog shooting by incompetent marksmen and poisoning with strychnine, that have been going on for years, and even more sad that our society is powerless to do something about it since there are no relevant laws in Jordan. The driver and rider(s) of truck 11773 should be severely reprimanded, as their appalling behaviour belittles the country.

We frequently hear horrific stories of how many shots it took to kill a dog. To some people

a pet is almost like one of the family and just because someone does not happen to like dogs he/she is not entitled to go round shooting them at random. More tolerance is required. In the case of the dog Mrs. Molloy saw, she was harming no one and kind people were feeding her. Why kill it?

Other countries deal with dog problems in much more humane ways. We can provide the Amman Municipality with information on how to deal with dogs in a much kinder way. Shooting could harm people as well as animals.

I am well aware that dogs are considered "dirty" in this part of the world, yet that is so only if owners keep them in bad conditions. There is no more faithful companion than a dog, and the Koran preaches that cruelty to any animal is totally unacceptable. Animals and plants

have as much of a right as we have to be on this planet.

This uncivilised treatment of God's creatures is a disgrace to the country and shames it in front of foreign visitors. It is high time for the government to step in and pass laws regarding cruelty to animals.

While being well aware of the vast number of human problems in the region, one should not forget all about animals. Some action should be taken soon for their protection.

Chris Larter,
Jordanian Society for the
Protection of Animals,
Amman 11814.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

The widening Gulf

By Ali Kassay

I HAVE always been fascinated by words. In every language, almost every word carries, in addition to its obvious meaning, a variety of implicit ones which allow the person, if he is interested, to discern much about the self-image and world view of the people that use the language. Take, for instance, the Greek word *xenos*. Originally it means "stranger" as well as "guest", which would seem to suggest that the ancient Greeks were a very hospitable people. That is, until one comes across the word *xenophobia*, which makes one wonder if the Greeks were not expressing fear and hatred of guests.

But putting aside facetiousness, which requires of me a great deal of will power, I confess that I am particularly fascinated by the number of languages in which the reference to one's own race is the same reference to mankind as a whole. Understandably, this tendency to see the world in terms of one's own tribe or village tended to be prevalent among isolated races. The sooner man started interacting with others, the sooner he shed the notion that the world revolved around him. The experience is often painful. One day, one is sitting very snug in his little realm thinking that God is in His heaven and all is well with the world, then the next day he steps outside and discovers that there is quite a lot more that life can and does offer to those who work for it.

This, more or less, is what happened to a friend of mine who wanted to establish a joint venture industry with a foreign counterpart. The latter stipulated that the project should be based not in Jordan but in Egypt or Bahrain where the investment climate is friendly and where rules, regulations and practices are predictable as well as reasonable. My friend was amazed. He was under the impression that Jordan had placed itself not ahead of competition, then at least in a highly competitive position to attract foreign investment. Still, he agreed to visit Bahrain to humour his homologue.

When he arrived there he discovered that, far from being competitive, we were not even in the league. Over there procedures are simple, information is readily available, people are punctual and they even drive in an orderly manner. Moreover, Batelec, the Bahraini telecommunications company, provides an applicant with a new telephone line within five hours of receiving the application. I mean they measure the lag on a clock not a calendar.

I mention this story to highlight the point that some Arab countries are putting themselves streaks ahead of us in economic development, national institution building and human resource development. Moreover, in the case of Bahrain, this progress was achieved by a small Arab country (even smaller in size than Jordan), that lacks oil and whose traditional social structure is very similar to ours, except that they had a mercantile tradition, whereas ours was predominantly agricultural.

Naturally, one cheers wholeheartedly at the achievements of any Arab country. But at the same time, one may be permitted to ask the legitimate question: "Why are we not doing as well?" It is saddening that the word "gulf" can now be applied to describe the ever widening gap that has come to separate Jordan from the more advanced Arab countries. And since we are clearly lagging behind, should Jordan not consider inviting experts from Bahrain or other Gulf countries to help us manage our affairs?

Jordan, U.S. investment treaty in final stage

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The U.S. and Jordan have finalised a bilateral investment treaty that both sides expect would give a significant boost to economic cooperation and clear hurdles in sizeable American private sector investments in the Kingdom.

The provisions of the proposed agreement include limits on expropriation of investments and prompt and adequate compensation for investors, the right to transfer and investment-related funds into and outside the country, limits on the host government's rights to impose performance requirements on investments, binding international arbitration, and the right of the investor to engage senior personnel of the investor's own choice regardless of nationality.

The draft, which is currently under study by the

Council of Ministers, is the latest move in expanding Jordanian-U.S. economic relationship following the signing of the October 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel under Washington's sponsorship.

One of the key features of the proposed treaty was a provision that Jordan would strictly enforce protection for U.S. patent and trade marks and intellectual property rights (IPR) on a bilateral basis.

But, given that Jordan is continuing work on effective and strictly enforceable legislation in Jordan to protect patents and trade marks and IPRs, said an official, "it was decided that this issue was separated from the document."

The official noted that the question of IPRs was of major concern to Jordan, which is negotiating accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and an "association agreement" with the European Union.

Both WTO and EU have their own requirements for protection of patents and trade marks and IPRs.

U.S. Ambassador Wesley Egan told a Rotary Club meeting late last year the U.S. opted for the separation because protection for IPRs warranted legislation and involved a lengthy process through the government and Parliament. This would have held up the bilateral investment agreement itself, which the U.S. sees as a key vehicle to bring in American private sector investment into Jordan.

American banks and government funding agencies consider the existence of such a bilateral agreement as a highly favourable point while considering financing for U.S. firms investing in a foreign country.

A U.S. embassy spokesman said the investment treaty itself was "in its final stages" and the formal signing of the document

was "imminent."

Officials here credit the late U.S. commerce secretary, Ron Brown, for the initiative to work out of a bilateral investment treaty during talks he held during his visits here in 1994.

The document is the latest in a series of measures Washington has undertaken to help develop the Jordanian economy in the past year.

Other moves included the granting of:

— \$200 million in export credit guarantees and insurance through the Exim-bank.

— \$40 million in commodity credits.

— \$21 million in soft loan financing for grain purchases.

— \$1.25 million to conduct studies on expanding and upgrading communication facilities and management.

An "Open Skies" agreement under which Jordanian air carriers are

allowed to fly in and out of the United States without any restrictions on frequency or destination.

Jordan is the only country to receive such U.S. treatment other than European countries.

The Clinton administration has also granted the Kingdom the status of a non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally that gives "priority consideration" for its requests for advanced military technology and equipment.

Jordan received \$100 million worth of American military equipment and will receive 16 F-16 fighter jets this year.

Bahrain minister urges firms to employ Bahrainis

MANAMA (R) — Bahrain's labour and social affairs minister urged firms to employ more Bahrainis to reduce foreign remittances and boost the island's economy, local newspapers said Tuesday.

They quoted Minister Abdul Nabi Al Shula as saying foreign workers remit around 300 million dinars (nearly \$800 million) to their homelands every year. Around 120 million dinars were remitted through official channels and 180 million through unofficial channels annually. Mr. Shula said.

"This affects our economy. What would happen if this money is spent in Bahrain's market instead of being sent abroad... Wouldn't it strengthen our economy?" the daily Bahrain Tribune quoted him as saying.

Hundreds of thousands of foreign workers, mainly from the Indian subcontinent, work in the Arab Gulf state.

Bahrain has embarked on an ambitious vocational training programme to find more jobs for Bahrainis facing rising unemployment, a factor in more than two years of sporadic anti-government unrest.

Extra energy income is Yemen economy's best hope

SANAA (R) — Strong world oil prices, increased production and a new revenue stream from gas are Yemen's best hope to escape from its position as one of the poorest Arab countries, analysts and diplomats have said.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh's coalition government is counting on increased oil income and a \$3 billion gas project to lift the economy.

The natural gas scheme, a joint venture with French oil group Total S.A., includes construction of a liquefied natural gas plant and export terminal on the Gulf of Aden which will be connected to gas fields by a 380-kilometre pipeline.

Yemen is credited with making good progress in implementing a five-year structural reform programme agreed with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1995.

"Progress was very good in 1996," said Mohammad Said Al Attar, one of four deputy prime ministers. "The stability of the rial and the rate of growth show lots of improvement."

"Comparing Yemen with other countries in the area, we've made very good progress and after the elections next month there will be further progress in the implementation of reforms," he added.

Mr. Attar said without elaborating there would be development on the privatisation of some banks and electricity projects.

The government removed all exchange controls last year, abolishing an official rate of 50 riyals to the dollar. The devaluated rial now floats around 125 riyals.

It has also managed to reduce inflation that was in three figures two years ago. But Western diplomats monitoring the economy said more needed to be done. Subsidies on some agricultural produce including wheat and also on fuel are still in place.

"The economy is picking up but the ordinary man in the street has not yet seen any benefits," a diplomat representing one of Yemen's many Western aid donors said.

Action on a third phase of IMF reforms is expected after general elections to be held on April 27, the diplomat said.

President Saleh has been president of northern Yemen since 1978 and the unified north and south since 1990. Diplomats and Yemeni political analysts expect his Gen-

eral People's Congress, which dominates the outgoing parliament and controls two-thirds of the coalition cabinet, to win the parliamentary election easily.

The World Bank estimates Yemen will be one of the region's fastest-growing economies this year with gross domestic product likely to increase at a rate of 6.6 per cent in real terms.

The Washington-based bank in January offered Yemen a \$60 million soft loan to set up a financial market and improve the country's banking and monetary system.

Yemen's economic woes stem from a two-month civil war in 1994 in which forces loyal to President Saleh crushed southern secessionists at a cost of \$11 billion and 4,000 dead, and an earlier political decision — sympathy with Iraq in the 1990-91 Gulf crisis over the invasion of Kuwait.

Sanat's Baghdad tilt infuriated Arab Gulf states who punished Yemen by cutting financial aid, isolating it and sending home 700,000 Yemenis working in the Gulf whose \$1 billion annual remittances were a key source of revenue.

The mass repatriation increased unemployment, which is still high at around 25 per cent of the workforce in the fast-growing 16 million population.

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	SEK	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.5710	0.6068	1.4420	122.71	1.3670	1666.00	1.3782	6.3240
GB Sterling	1.4480	2.7538	-	2.3744	201.34	2.2888	2745.90	3.0956	2.2898
JP Yen	0.0081	1.3816	0.4843	1.1753	-	1.1297	13.59	163.09	4.8338
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0014	0.3438	0.8864	1301.06	0.8309	-	11.20	3.3714
FR Franc	0.1778	0.2588	0.1078	28.8264	21.78	0.2463	33.38	33.3500	-

Energy		
Only	Last	Previous
Brent	18.40	18.30
Italy	18.40	18.30
UL Gas	203.00	204.00

Mid-East Currencies						
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	FRF
SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4458	0.16191	0.38470	32.7172	-
KW Dinar	3.3028	0.51678	2.00401	4.70044	408.186	-
CY Pound	1.9888	3.3378	1.2116	2.881	248.823	-

Metal Prices		
Metal	Buy	Offer
Gold (m's)	380	380.5
Platinum (m's)	388.5	378.5
CU (3 Months)	2388	2382
Lead (3 Months)	688	688

Currency Deposit Rates (Bld)						
Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months	Year
USD	6.55	6.50	6.53	6.57	6.52	-
JPY	0.38	0.40	0.46	0.51	0.55	-
FRF	3.23	3.24	3.28	3.35	3.44	-
ITL	7.51	7.51	7.51	7.51	7.51	-

Main Equity Indices							
Bourse	Index	Value	Change	% Change	High	Low	Pr. Ch.
New York	DOW JONES	6888.34	15.88	0.24	6821.82	6848.47	6883.48
London	FT-SE 100	4248.1	-44.5	-1.5	4368.1	4200.5	4312.3
Paris	CAC 40	2881.82	-74.86	-2.62	2952.18	2888.18	2888.88

Energy		
Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/lbs)	200	Spot
Sugar (c/lbs)	387.4	Spot
Soy (c/lbs)	22.67	Spot
Barley (c/lbs)	8	Spot

JOD Cross Rates			
Currency	Buy	Sell	
US Dollar	0.706	0.710	
DE Mark	0.423	0.4281	
FR Franc	0.1286	0.1282	
NL Guilder	0.3782	0.3791	

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

OUR GREATEST STRENGTH IS OUR WEAKNESS FOR FASHION

...and then there's the work of

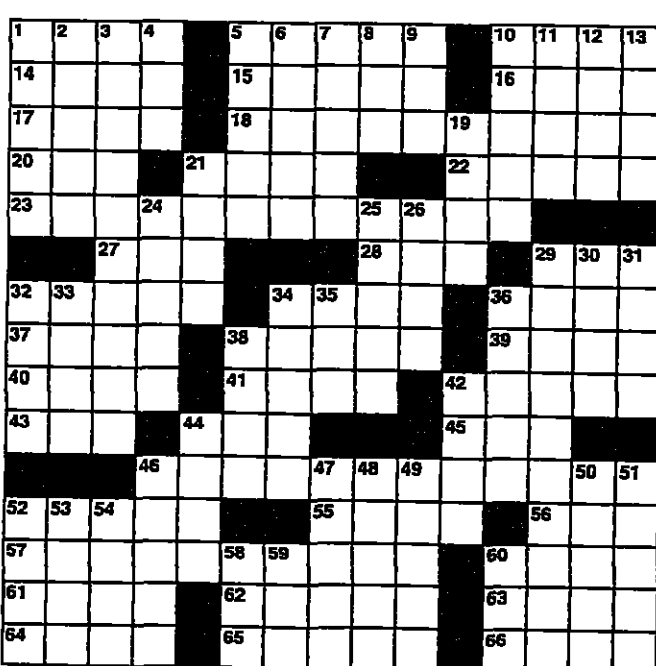


Amra Forum Hotel.
Phone: 5527118 Fax 5527119
Amman

THE Daily Crossword

ACROSS

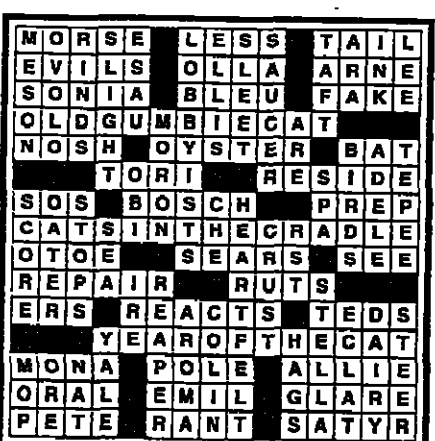
- 1 Mistake
- 5 Cub Scout leader
- 10 Box
- 14 Relinquish
- 15 Traveled
- 16 Wan
- 17 Culture medium
- 18 Augusta antagonist?
- 20 Cheer
- 21 Healthy
- 22 Start
- 23 Miami meanie?
- 26 Chill
- 27 Distress call
- 29 Preposterous
- 32 Frame
- 34 Glut
- 36 Study intensely
- 37 Disregard
- 38 Certain brass
- 39 Before: pref.
- 40 Nettle
- 41 Augury
- 42 Bustling about
- 43 Before
- 44 Resort
- 45 River inlet
- 46 Madison
- 52 John Jacob
- 55 Earth
- 56 Before the cart?
- 57 Carlsbad criminal?
- 60 Junior dry run
- 61 Vicinity
- 62 Obliterate
- 63 Cigar end
- 64 Youngster
- 65 Has courage
- 66 Votes for



by Roger Jurgovan

DOWN

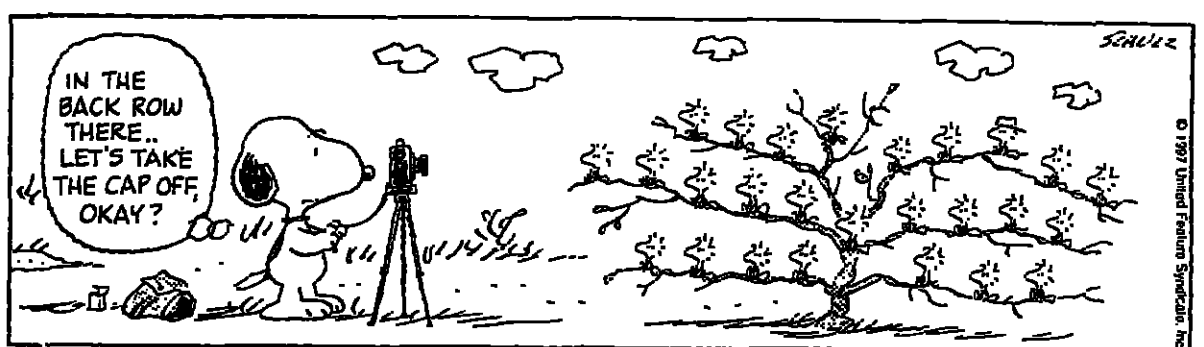
- 1 Neckwear
- 2 Licit
- 3 Coeur d'Alene combatant?
- 4 — capita
- 5 Ready for battle
- 6 Down under cuddly one
- 7 Ills
- 8 Deighton or Dawson
- 9 Refresher
- 10 Exhaust
- 11 Permit
- 12 "I cannot tell —"
- 13 Remainder
- 19 Additional
- 21 Faint streak
- 24 Course
- 25 Colossal one
- 26 Experts
- 29 Billings bad boy?
- 30 Against
- 31 Roe
- 32 Tender
- 33 Islamic prince
- 34 Poison oak
- 35 Honest —
- 36 Depression
- 38 Lids
- 42 Seed cover
- 44 Begot
- 46 Lady
- 47 Acting award



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- 48 Gallows item
- 49 Trigonometry functions
- 50 Gladden
- 51 Prices
- 52 Bio. subj.
- 53 Withered
- 54 Overly precious, in England
- 58 Crossed out
- 59 Nest egg letters
- 60 Pod occupant

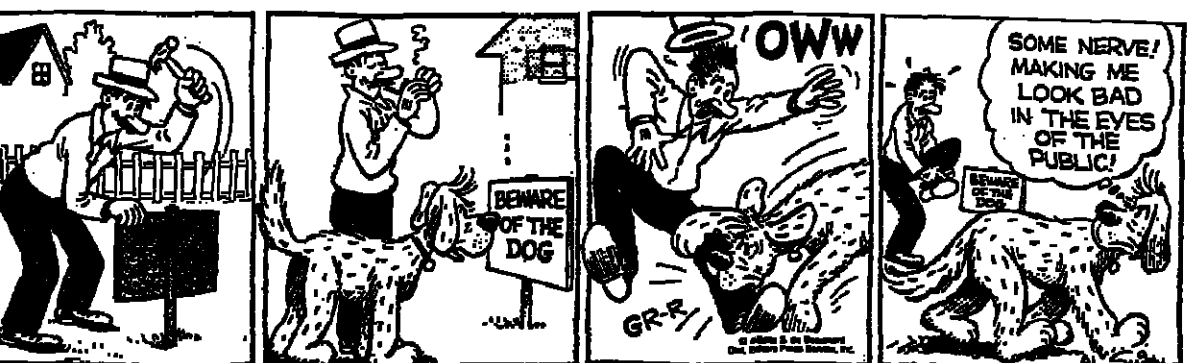
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY APRIL 2, 1997

By Thomas S. Piers
Astrologer, Curran
Richter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You may have a feeling of lack during the daytime today, however, by being objective, this will soon pass. Be very careful later this evening while driving on the highway so that you avoid any difficulties.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Try to be more independent today, rely upon your own abilities and thereby you will get noticed by those in authority. Labour on improving your health appearance, however, don't be vain about this.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Be more willing to do what your mate wishes today, and home conditions will improve considerably. Be sure you don't lose your temper later this evening, thereby eliminating the possibility of difficulties.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Avoid a person today who expects more from you than you are willing to give, which will create difficulties. Don't try to press anyone into supporting your ideas, thereby you won't get into any conflicts.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) If any dilemmas arise today, be sure to confront them directly and don't allow them to remain. Tonight is definitely not a good time for any romantic pursuits which could cause difficulty between you and your mate.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) This is a good day today to do the research which is necessary for a new project, however, don't try to force anyone else to do the career activities for you. Later this evening will be good for meeting with close friends.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Search your memory today and make sure you aren't overlooking any promises which were made in previous days. Drive on the highway with more than usual care so you won't get into any difficulties.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) A fellow business acquaintance may be quite greedy today, so be on the alert for this and stand up for your rights. Be considerate to your mate and show some affection towards him or her which will be appreciated.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Be sure to do your career activities well today, even if it seems somewhat boring. Disagreeing with a fellow associate would be unfortunate, so keep your mouth shut and thereby eliminating a difficult situation.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Small annoying tasks can be handled quite easily today, so make the effort to get them completed. Work out the detail later this evening of a recreational activity you have in mind with close friends.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Your mate may be a bit depressed today, so be consoling to him or her, which will be greatly appreciated. Try to make your home more comfortable, and revise your budget so that you can have extra funds for a rainy day.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Before you present a new plan of action to fellow business associates today, make sure you have it clear in your mind so that you avoid any errors. Don't disagree with your mate later this evening so that harmony will exist.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper.

Hingis rules the tennis world

KEY BISCAINE, Florida (R) — She's fresh-faced and formidable and now rules the world of women's tennis.

At age 16, Martina Hingis of Switzerland has swept aside her last 26 opponents on the fast track to becoming the youngest player ever to grab the top ranking in the world.

The latest player to fall to the Hingis combination of speed and tennis smarts was Monica Seles in the final of the Lipton championships. The execution was swift, as Hingis needed only 44 minutes in a 6-2 6-1 romp.

"It's just like a little dream comes true right now," said Hingis, who officially took over as queen of tennis when new rankings were released Monday.

"All the life you work for it and it's getting true, you're becoming the best player in the world."

Being the best can be an arduous job, but Hingis for now seems immune to the pressures the number one spot can bring.

"I've never had so much fun out there," says Hingis, who became the youngest player to win a Grand Slam title when she won the Australian Open in January.

"If you play well, you know you can beat almost everybody in the world. It's great to go out there and play in front of 10,000 people."

Even the absence from the Lipton championships of Steffi Graf, who lost her top ranking to the charging Hingis, was of no great concern to the Czech-born Swiss sensation.

"It doesn't matter to me if she can't play, compete at this tournament," Hingis



World No. 1 Martina Hingis

says of Graf. "It's not my problem. She has to be prepared and try to play at these tournaments. If she's not able to, somebody else is going to step there."

Hingis takes time from the rigours of competition to blow off steam.

An avid horsewoman, Hingis travels with "my boots and pants" in hopes of a joyous ride. Rollerblades also fit into the suitcase and residents on Key Biscayne have stopped and stared at the Swiss miss skates by.

"I can't be all the time here at the courts," Hingis said. "It would just get crazy if you would spend all the time on the site. For me, it's important to do something

- WTA RANKINGS**
1. Martina Hingis (Switzerland) 4711.5000pts
 2. Steffi Graf (Germany) 4249.5000
 3. Jana Novotna (Czech Republic) 3427.4412
 4. Arantxa Sanchez Vicario (Spain) 3409.6871
 5. Monica Seles (U.S.) 3231.8083
 6. Conchita Martinez (Spain) 2880.6710
 7. Anke Huber (Germany) 2538.0388
 8. Lindsay Davenport (U.S.) 2485.0667
 9. Irina Spirlea (Romania) 2266.7950
 10. Iva Majoli (Croatia) 2254.2820
 11. Mary Joe Fernandez (U.S.) 1792.5113
 12. Karina Habsudova (Slovakia) 1784.2182
 13. Barbara Paulus (Austria) 1696.2813
 14. Mary Pierce (France) 1594.8195
 15. Amanda Coetzer (South Africa) 1489.7000

else." The trip to the top has been a wonderful ride. Surprisingly mature for her

age, Hingis never appears intimidated by opponents or anything else. Nor does she anticipate feeling fearful of

weighty expectations.

"What should I be afraid of?" said Hingis, tossing a questioning look. "Why should I be worried? Everything is perfect."

Hingis even turns a nonchalant eye to the vast amounts of money she's amassed. This year alone, she's earned over \$1 million.

"The money is rolling," she laughs. "Well, life doesn't change because you just won \$100,000 more or less. I still can't drive a car. I still can't go out. I still can't do that because I'm underage everywhere."

Everywhere, that is, except in the world of tennis.

Colombia hit by suspensions for Paraguay match

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — Colombia, who have led the South American World Cup qualifying tournament from the start, could be toppled on Wednesday when they travel to second-placed Paraguay with several key players suspended.

Third-placed Argentina head uphill to Bolivia after one of the most painstaking preparations for a single match in their history, hoping to build on their 1-0 win away to Colombia in February.

Uruguay have a chance to revive their ailing aspirations with a home game against bottom-team Venezuela as the second half of the marathon competition, in which the nine teams play each other twice, gets under way.

The top four countries qualify for France and with eight games left each, only Venezuela, on one point, do not have a realistic chance of reaching the finals. Only three points separate Argentina and eighth-placed Peru.

However, the current standings could prove deceptive as some teams have played more home games than others.

Paraguay, whose only defeat was away to Colombia in their opening game, trail the leaders on goal difference and have won all their games so far in their intimidating "defenders of the Chaco" stadium.

Inspired by goalkeeper-cum-marksmen Jose Luis Chilavert, Paraguay are excellent-placed to qualify for the first time since 1986, especially as they have five home games left.

Colombia, after the morale-shattering defeat against Argentina which cost them their unbeaten record, have to plug the holes caused by the suspensions of midfielder Freddy Rincon, full-back Wilmer Cabrera and defender Jorge Bermudez.

The trio, whose experience would have been invaluable in the Asuncion hot-house, all have two yellow cards. Coach Hernan Dairo Gomez will also have to find a new striking partner for Faustino Asprilla as first choice Ivan Valencia is ruled out through injury. "It will be a very difficult game," Asprilla said last week. "It is important that we start picking up points again."

Argentina will have to overcome the altitude of La Paz, 3,600 metres above sea level, and have been training in the bleak Altiplano on their own side of the border for the last three weeks in preparation.

"The players have completed the adaptation cycle," team doctor Eduardo Bellman said at the weekend. Only Ariel Ortega, who on Sunday was voted best player in the country in a survey by the daily newspaper Clarin, did not go through the full process.

The match revives memories of 1973 when Argentina beat Bolivia 1-0 with a team of non-regular internationals who were picked especially to play in La Paz and spent weeks training for the march.

The players, controversially, did not get to play in the World Cup and the team was known as "the ghosts."

On this occasion, however, Argentina are taking their full-strength squad and can expect a hot reception after coach Daniel Passarella described conditions in La Paz as "inhuman" for soccer.

Ecuador, in fourth place, appear well-placed to reach the World Cup for the first time but have not yet won a point outside their own country and play five of their remaining games away.

On Wednesday they travel to Peru, who they beat 4-1 at home last year. Peru themselves have four home games left.

In early 1995, the two nations were involved in a border conflict that killed dozens and injured hundreds. Because of this, the national anthems will not be played to avoid arousing nationalist passions.

Bolivia, two points behind Ecuador, have the biggest home advantage thanks to altitude but appear to have wasted it, having drawn four of their six home games. Victory against Argentina is essential to keep them in the race.

Two times world champions Uruguay, who trail Bolivia on goal difference, have only three home games left and appear to be in serious danger of missing out the World Cup for the second time running.

Beating Venezuela at home may restore confidence but is unlikely to help them much, as all the other teams also expect to pick up three teams against a team that is out of its depth.

Chile, one point below Uruguay and three below Ecuador, play six of their remaining games at home, where they have a 100 per cent record so far. They are not involved in the action on Wednesday, when they travel to Brazil for a friendly.

Two seeds fall on opening day at Hilton Head Island

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. (R) — Tenth seed Karina Habsudova of Slovakia and 15th seed Elena Likhovtseva of Russia suffered first-round defeats at the Family Circle Cup women's tennis tournament Monday as the clay court season got underway.

Habsudova, ranked 12th in the world, fell to 53rd-ranked Alexandra Fusai of France 7-6, 6-3.

The 19th-ranked Likhovtseva looked to have her match well in hand before 40th-ranked Italian Silvia Farina bounced back for a 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory.

Ninth-seeded Iva Majoli of Croatia, the highest seed to see opening-day action, struggled early but survived with a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 victory over Canadian qualifier Rene Simpson.

Majoli said the adjustment from playing on hardcourts to the slow, soft clay gave her some early problems.

"It takes some time to get used to, especially as far as sliding on the court," Majoli said.

"It's easy to lose control of your feet. In the beginning, I was a little scared, but I got comfortable later on."

Hard-serving Dutchwoman Brenda Schultz-McCarthy, seeded 14th, had all she could handle from Elena Makarova. The Russian, ranked a lowly 93rd in the world, kept Schultz-McCarthy on court for two hours and 20 minutes before the 14th seed finally prevailed 3-6, 7-6 (7-2), 6-4.

The strong field is headed by 16-year-old Swiss sensation Martina Hingis, who was expected to play her first match as the No. 1 player in the world Tuesday night.

Hingis, who takes five titles and a 26-0 1997 match record into this event, opens against Germany's Barbara Rittner in the second round after receiving a first-round bye.

Monica Seles, who was crushed by Hingis in the Lipton championships final Saturday, is also entered into this event.

Shearer and Weah lined up for Hong Kong handover spectacular

HONG KONG (AFP) — George Weah and Alan Shearer will lead a FIFA all star side to play Asia's best in a soccer spectacular for Hong Kong's handover, officials said Tuesday.

Other top names are also being lined up for the July 3 match, two days after Britain transfers sovereignty of the colony, for the most political event FIFA has linked its name to.

The match and a host of other events is being organised by the sport community for celebration of reunification of Hong Kong with China,

also known as the reunification sports committee.

Timothy Fok, executive vice-president of the committee, said:

"We are delighted that we have been able to secure such top level names to support this extraordinary and happy moment."

Fok's father Henry Fok, a tycoon with close links to China, is a former executive member of the international football federation (FIFA).

Fok said stars from past World Cup winning sides and other top names in the world of football had already confirmed for the

all star team, but he declined to release names.

"A team of 16 has been selected by FIFA and so far seven players have confirmed but as we are getting confirmations every day we won't release a full lineup for a while."

Shearer, Newcastle United's 15 million pound (\$22.5 million) striker, was second to Brazil's Ronaldo in this year's world player of the year award and AC Milan scorer Weah won the title last year.

The Asian team will be chosen by the Asian Football Confederation

(AFC), which has invited 18 players, including two from China — Fan Zhiyi and Hao Haidong.

Others expected to confirm are South Korea's Hwang Sun Hwang, Dusit Chalemsorn from Thailand and Asian player of the year Masami Ihara from Japan.

Asia has not fielded an all-star side since the 1960s but FIFA's team has performed regularly for charity and at exhibition matches around the world. The last match was in New York last July.

Pro-China groups are organising a host of concerts, fireworks and harbour displays around the handover at midnight on June 30, which is expected to attract world-wide attention.

"These events are very important but the community is so sports mad that this event may touch the lives of more people," said Fok.

The reunification sports committee has been set up by sports leaders in the territory and Fok said other events were planned for the handover.

"We intend to use the surplus from the match to pay for a full time foundation, working to build on the July celebrations," said Fok.

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GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNIA HIRSCH

WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

46 QJ84 QAKJ7 AAJ876

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST

1A Pass 2A Pass

What do you bid now?

Q. 2 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

AAJ 878 04 AEJ10543

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST

1A 3A Pass Pass

What action do you take?

Q. 3 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

4Q1842 QJ76 083 48842

The bidding has proceeded:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH

2A 2NT Pass 7

What action do you take?

Q. 4 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

AA QAK10843 QK1075 482

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST

1NT Pass 3A Pass

What do you bid now?

Q. 5 - North-South vulnerable, as South you hold:

AAK95 QJ876 084 AE63

The bidding has proceeded:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH

1A 3A 3A 3A

What action do you take?

Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

495 QAK83 QAKJ92 AE6

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST

2A 2A 1A 2A

What do you bid now?

TODAY AT	<p>CINEMA TEL:634144</p> <p>PHILADELPHIA "1"</p> <p>Sally Field, Kiefer Sutherland and Ed Harris... in</p> <p>EYE FOR AN EYE</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL:634144</p> <p>PHILADELPHIA "2"</p> <p>Kevin Bacon, Robert Deniro, Dustin Hoffman, Jason Patric and Brad Pitt.... in</p> <p>SLEEPERS</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL:699238</p> <p>PLAZA</p> <p>Adel Imam, Shireen & Saeed Saleh</p> <p>Bakhit Wa Adillah (2)</p> <p>Al Jardal Walkankah</p> <p>Shows: 12:00, 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL:677420</p> <p>CONCORD</p> <p>CONCORD "1"</p> <p>MADONNA & ANTONIO BANDERAS...IN</p> <p>EVITA</p> <p>(new print)</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>Nabil & Hisham's Theatre</p> <p>TEL: 625155</p> <p>Amn.. Ya Ho</p> <p>The theatre is closed every Saturday & Sunday</p> <p>For reservations call 625155</p>
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Arizona wins 1st NCAA title in OT

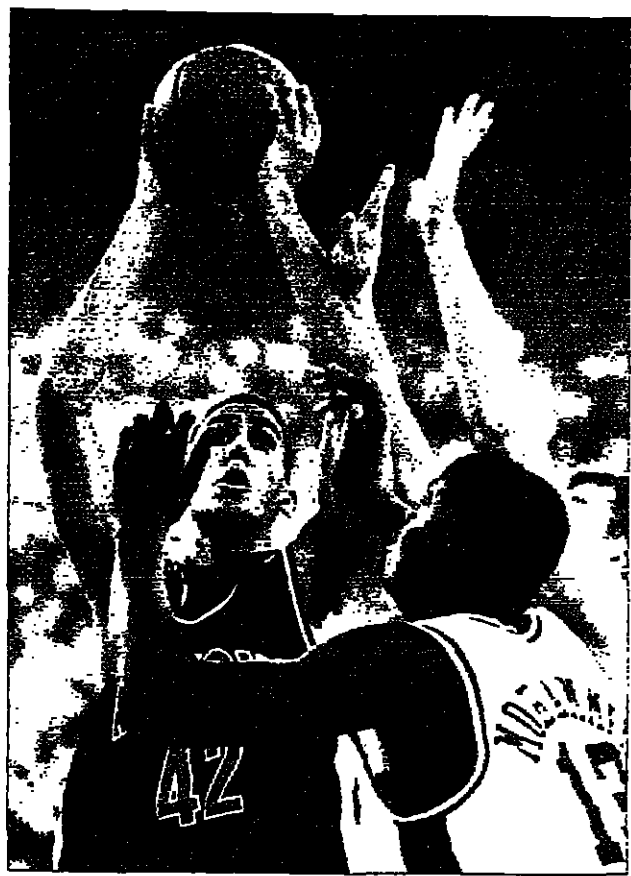
INDIANAPOLIS (R) — Miles Simon and 19-year-old Mike Bibby led Arizona to its first National Collegiate Basketball Championship Monday, winning a gritty 84-79 overtime victory over defending champion Kentucky.

Simon, the final four Most Valuable Player and Arizona's team leader although a junior, scored 30 points.

"I knelt down," said Simon. "I was glad it was over. It was a war. It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable."

"What a great game, what a great effort," said Arizona coach Lute Olson.

Arizona became the first fourth seed in NCAA tournament history to beat three



Arizona center A.J. Bramlett (L) shoots over the arms of Kentucky center Nazr Mohammed in the first half during the NCAA Final Four national championship game in Indianapolis (Reuters photo)

regional top seeds — Kansas, North Carolina and nationally top-ranked

Arab Table Tennis Cup

Qatar's Hamadi and Tunisia's Losif crowned champions

Jordan finishes 4th as Tunisia dominates doubles

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Qatar's Hamad Al Hamadi Tuesday retained his title when he was crowned champion of the 6th Arab Table Tennis Cup after beating Saudi Arabia's Shiber Awami (3-0) in a heated match at Al Hussein Youth City.

Tunisia's Nadia Losif was crowned champion in the women's singles when she beat Lebanon's Larissa Shoaib (3-2) ending the matches of the four-day championship in which nine countries took part.

In the doubles championship Tunisia took the lion's share in both the men's and women's doubles.

Tunisia's Basheer Ben Abdullah and Mukhtar Bo Aziz teamed up to clinch first place from Qatar's Hamad Al Hamadi and Aref Abdulrahman 2-0 (21/17 and 21/17).

Saudi Arabia followed in the third place after losing to Tunisia's team 2-1 (17/21, 21/17 and 20/22).

Jordan came fourth after having a couple of set backs against Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's teams.

In women's doubles, Tunisia's Nadia Losif and Afaf Nowar took first place after beating Lebanon's Larissa Shoaib and Jocelyn Track 2-1

(16-21, 21-17 and 21-19).

Syria came in third and Jordan fourth.

Jordan's best results in the singles was Alia Tufaha's third place finish after beating Lebanon's Jocelyn Track 3-1. Tufaha had lost the chance to qualify for the final after earlier losing to Tunisia's Losif 2-0.

In men's singles too, Abdul Aziz Rida failed to qualify to the finals after he lost 2-1 to Saudi Arabia's Shiber Awami. Rida took third place after beating Shafiq Mustafa 3-1.

Results of men's matches

•Hamad Al Hamadi+Aref Abdul Rahman (Qatar) — Mustafa Rimal+Isam Binawi (Morocco) 21-6, 21-10

•Abdul Aziz Rida+Iyad Maknay (Jordan) — Osama Al Mak (Sudan) + Mohammad Al Habash (Lebanon) 9-21, 23-21, 22-20

•Basheer Ben Abdullah+Mukhtar Bo Aziz (Tunisia) — Raed Sharief+Radi Sharief (Palestine) 21-18, 14-21, 21-15

•Nabil Maghaw+Shiber Awami (Saudi Arabia) — Mustafa Rida+Bashar Kurdi (Jordan) 18-21, 21-14, 21-15

•Hamad Al Hamadi+Aref Abdulrahman (Qatar) — Abed Aziz Rida+Iyad Maknay (Jordan) 21-19-18-21-21-16

•Basheer Ben Abdullah+Mukhtar Bo Aziz (Tunisia) — Nabil Maghaw+Shiber Awami (Saudi Arabia) 21-17, 17-21, 22-21

•Basheer Ben Abdullah+Mukhtar Bo Aziz (Tunisia) — Hamad Al Hamadi+Aref Abdulrahman (Qatar) 21-17, 21-17

Results of women's matches

•Larissa Shoaib+Jocelyn Track (Lebanon) — Alia Tufaha+Hamadi Tufaha (Jordan) 21-19, 21-14

•Nadia Losif+Afaf Nowar (Tunisia) — Suha Anous+Hadia Abu Shum (Syria) 21-11, 21-17

•Larissa Shoaib+Jocelyn Track (Lebanon) — Riham Halaq+Hadeel Awad (Jordan) 20-22, 21-12, 21-10

•Nadia Losif+Afaf Nowar (Tunisia) — Larissa Shoaib+Jocelyn Track (Lebanon) 16-21, 21-17, 21-19

Past champions of the Arab Table Tennis Championships which started in 1987:

Casablanca (1987) — Imad Jihad (Iraq)
Riyadh (1989) — Munir Jassem (Iraq)
Amman (1992) — A Aziz Rida (Jordan)
Morocco (1993) — Ashraf Hilmi (Egypt)
Tunisia (1995) — H. Al Hamadi (Qatar)

Major League Baseball preview

Interleague play leads changes on tap in 1997 season

NEW YORK (R) — Major League Baseball, which is dedicating the 1997 campaign to the anniversary of the most profound change in the game, launches a new season Tuesday full of fresh twists and challenges.

The world series champion New York Yankees will play the New York Mets, and the Chicago Cubs will battle the Chicago White Sox this season in games that count as nearly 100 years of tradition dissolves with the advent of inter-league play.

Purists are outraged. Others are salivating at the prospect of stirring up new rivalries and fleshing out what had been only a match-up fantasy of day-dreaming fans.

It is fitting that this breaking down of barriers comes as baseball celebrates the greatest dream come true for the game — the smashing of the colour line 50 years ago by Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

National League team sketches (in order of last season's finish):

EAST DIVISION

•Atlanta Braves — added game's premier leadoff hitter in Kenny Lofton. Traded away Marquis Grissom and David Justice and made room for young phenom Andrew Jones. Still boast one of the great pitching rotations of all time around core of Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz. 1996 record: 96-66 (national league champions)

•Montreal Expos — Talent drain continues for small market team that has always struggled to compete within budget. Gone this year are starter Jeff Fassero, stopper Mel Rojas and outfielder Moises Alou, manager Felipe Alou's son. Bright hope is much heralded rookie outfielder Vladimir Guerrero. 1996

record: 88-74.

•Florida Marlins — may be league's most improved team. Hired former Pittsburgh manager Jim Leyland to run the club and fortified the lineup with bobby Bonilla and Moses Alou. Added White Sox ace Alex Fernandez to impressive starting staff. 1996 record: 80-82.

•New York Mets — added John Olerud, one-time sweet swinging first baseman from Toronto who hopes to regain stroke. Need turnaround season from Carlos Baerga and help from young pitchers to make any headway. 1996 record: 71-91

•Philadelphia Phillies — New manager in Terry Francona. Added Danny Tartabull, Rico Brogna and Rex Hudler. Former starwars Darren Daulton and Lenny Dykstra hurting. Time for rebuilding. 1996 record: 67-95.

CENTRAL DIVISION

•St. Louis Cardinals — added Delino Deshields as second baseman for a dash of speed. Ozzie Smith finally gone, leaving shortstop solely in the hands of Royce Clayton. Could repeat again in weak division if ageing stopper Dennis Eckersley has anything left. 1996 record: 88-74

•Houston Astros — Pulled broadcaster Larry Dierker out of the booth and made him manager without any coaching or managing experience. Lost Brian Hunter, Orlando Miller and Todd Jones. Have had three successive runner-up finishes but need big pitching year to contend. 1996 record: 82-80

•Cincinnati Reds — added Deion Sanders, Ruben Sierra. Lost Eric Davis, Kevin Mitchell. Need strong pitching, including bounce back from injury by Pete Schourek, to threaten cards. 1996 record: 81-81

•Chicago Cubs — added

Mel Rojas and brought back shortstop Shawn Dunston. Lost starter Jaime Navarro. Starting pitching is not good weakness to have in hitter-friendly Wrigley field. 1996 record: 76-86

•Pittsburgh Pirates — Gene Lamont is new manager. Added Kevin Elster but lost Jay Bell, Jeff King, Carlos Garcia and Orlando Merced. Can't tell the players without a scorecard. —

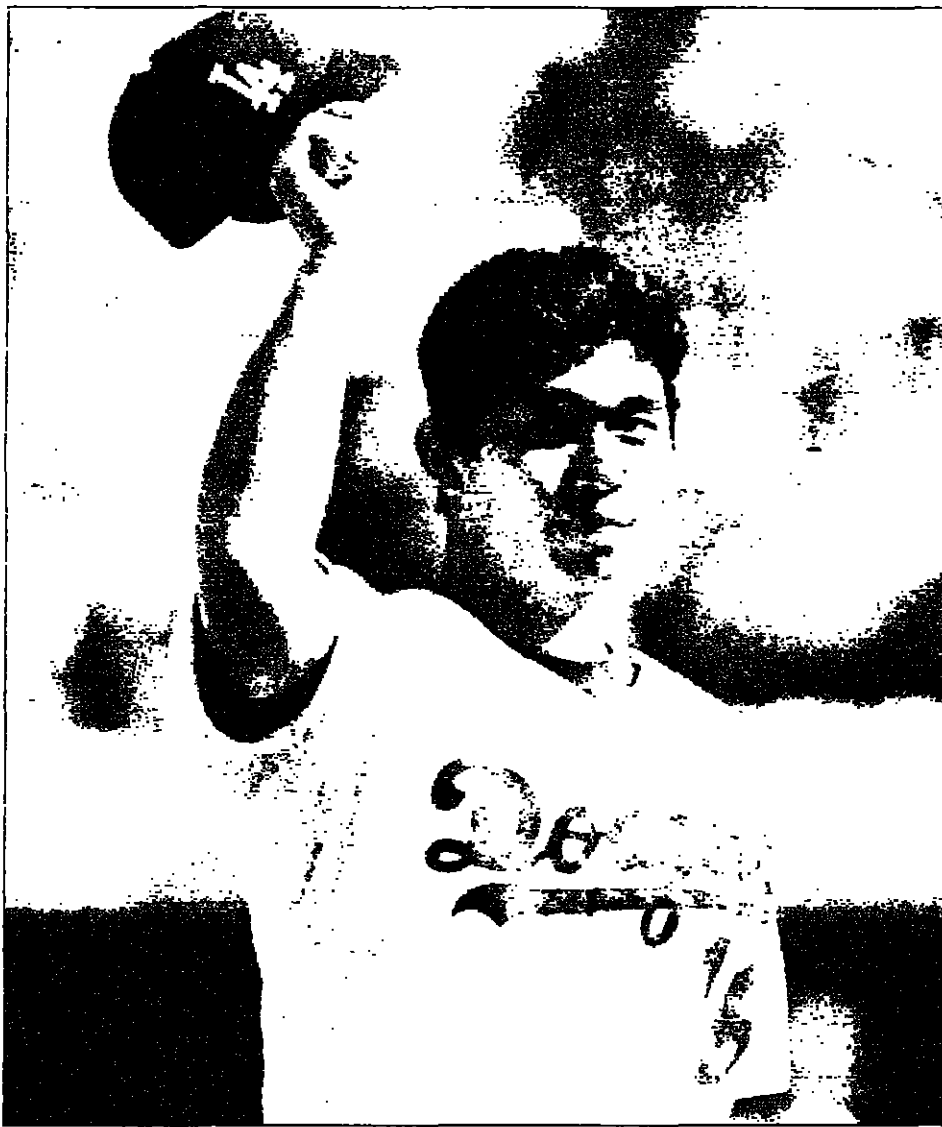
WEST DIVISION

•San Diego Padres — won first division title since 1984 last season. Added second baseman Quilvo Veras and lefthander Sterling Hitchcock. Lost Scott Sanders, Bob Tewksbury and Jody Reed. Inability to sign Japanese pitching star Hideo Ibrau a disappointment. If Ken Caminiti bounces back from shoulder surgery to regain 1996 MVP form, Padres could repeat. 1996 record: 91-71

•Los Angeles Dodgers — Bill Russell gets first full season as successor to legendary manager Tommy Lasorda. Added Todd Zeile at third. Lost Delino De Shields and Mike Blowers. Strong starting rotation featuring Hideo Nomo and Ramon Martinez keeps them in contention. International rotation may also feature Korean fireballer Chan Ho Park. 1996 record: 90-72

•Colorado Rockies — a Jekyll and Hyde team, extremely tough to beat at home but tied for worst road record last year. Basically unchanged but a healthy Dante Bichette and Larry Walker could make an improvement. 1996 record: 83-79

•San Francisco Giants — team belongs to Barry Bonds but loss of prime time slugger Matt Williams will cost in run production. Infield underwent off-season face lift with addition of



Hideo Nomo of the L.A. Dodgers

Jeff Kent, Jose Vizcaino and J.T. Snow. Shaky pitching keeps them at bottom. 1996 record: 68-94

American League team sketches (in order of last season's finish):

EAST DIVISION

•New York Yankees — World Series champions turning over closer chores to young Panamanian Mariano Rivera now that ace John Wetteland has signed on with the Texas Rangers. Mike Stanton, Jeff Nelson, Graeme Lloyd counted on

for critical set-up role performed so brilliantly last year by Rivera. Former Baltimore lefty David Wells takes place of Jimmy Key in the rotation. 1996 record: 92-70 (world series champions)

•Baltimore Orioles — may have improved clubhouse chemistry with loss of Bobby Bonilla. Biggest off-season change was internal as iron man Cal Ripken hands shortstop job to Mike Bordick and steps over to play third. Eric Davis expected to give

speed/power lift to attack. 1996 record: 88-74

•Boston Red Sox — Lost longtime ace Roger Clemens to Toronto. Experimenting all over

Diamond. Moved regular shortstop John Valentin to second base to make room for young Nomar Garciaparra, and could have whole new outfield with converted infielder Wil Cordero in left, Japan League returnee Shane Mack in centre and tiger castoff Rudy Pemberton in right. Jimmy Williams takes

over as manager. 1996 record: 85-77

•Toronto Blue Jays — made biggest improvement over off-season. Added Clemens to formidable rotation that already includes Cy young winner Pat Hentgen and era leader Juan Guzman. Added bats of Carlos Garcia (second base), Orlando Merced (outfield) and Benito Santiago (catcher) to bolster weak offence. 1996 record: 74-88

•Detroit Tigers — added speedy centerfielder Brian Hunter, shortstop Orlando Miller and stopper Todd Jones. Bright spot on staff could be young lefty starter Justin Thompson. Slugging first baseman Tony Clark looks like the real thing but team has long way to go. 1996 record: 53-109

CENTRAL DIVISION

•Cleveland Indians — big changes in tribe team that went to world series two years ago but still look powerful. Added Matt Williams, marquis Grissom and David Justice. Gone is Albert Belle and Kenny Lofton. Jim Thome switches to first. Cloud hangs over legal problems facing closer Jose Mesa. 1996 record: 99-62

•Chicago White Sox — added Albert Belle but lost ace starter Alex Fernandez. Jaime Navarro. Doug Drabek try to pick up the rotation. Badly hurt by injury to power-hitting third baseman Robin Ventura, who could miss most of the year. 1996 record: 85-77

•Kansas City Royals — also busy in off-season, putting life into offence by adding Chili Davis, Jeff King and Jay Bell. If promising arms like Jose Rosado, Chris Haney and Brian Bevil develop could get interesting. 1996 record: 80-82

•Milwaukee Brewers —

have basically stayed put. Have righthander Cal Eldred for full season and hope young Jeff D'Amico continues to progress as a starting pitcher. 1996 record: 80-82

•Minnesota Twins — added catcher Terry Steinbach to attack and hope for continued development of young players such as Rich Becker, Matt Lawton and rookie Todd Walker. Pitching is a problem, but team could be on upswing. 1996 record: 78-84

WEST DIVISION

•Texas Rangers — Fixed only big problem from last year by signing relief ace Wetteland. Now hope shortstop Benji Gil and centerfielder Damon Buford can replace departed Kevin Elster and Darvyl Hamilton. Slugger Juan Gonzalez to miss early going due to injury. 1996 record: 85-76, first place

•Seattle Mariners — fortified starting staff with acquisition of Jeff Fassero and Scott Sanders. If fireballing Randy Johnson can return to form following injury-plagued 1996 season, the offensive-minded Mariners could overtake Texas. 1996 record: 85-76

•Oakland Athletics — Brought back bush brother Jose Canseco, reuniting him with Mark McGwire. Offence may be hurt by lack of table setter unless young shortstop Tony Batista steps up. Starting pitching could be a strength but bullpen is suspect. 1996 record: 78-84

•Anaheim Angels — biggest change was in name as have dropped state moniker in deference to locals in area and new owner Disney. Terry Collins is new manager. Rookie Darin Erstad may make a splash in an already lively lineup. 1996 record: 70-91.

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The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Ministry of Agriculture
Projects Directorate
Invitation to Tender
for the supply of fertilizers, Agricultural machinery for the Project of the increase of food production

The steering committee of the Projects Directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture invites interested Japanese Trading firms with representative office or liaison office in Jordan to submit their financial offers for the supply of fertilizer, agricultural machinery, vehicles and construction machinery for the project of the increase of food production financed by a grant aid from the Government of Japan for the purpose of contributing to the increase of food production in Jordan.

Interested companies can get the tender documents from the office of the technical adviser in MOA against non-refundable amount of JD200 per one set.
The last date for getting the tender documents is on Wednesday the 9th of April 1997.
Financial offers should be submitted in two copies to the office of the technical adviser in MOA not later than 12:00 O'clock local time on Saturday the 19th of May 1997.

Mijhim Al Khraisha
Minister of Agriculture
Chairman of the steering committee

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Iraq wants to double volume of U.N. deal

Baghdad to seek oil exports worth \$4 billion from May, Rasheed says

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq wants to double oil exports to \$4 billion every six months when the oil-for-food deal with the United Nations comes up for renewal in May, Oil Minister Amer Rasheed said Tuesday.

"We hope the Security Council will consider at least twice" the \$2 billion of oil Iraq is currently allowed to export over six months under the deal which took effect in December, he told AFP.

"We're pushing for this because it is essential and necessary" for the needs of Iraqis, said General Rasheed, who was interviewed after chairing talks with a Turkish delegation.

Gen. Rasheed said Iraq had to take the "influence of the Americans in the Security Council" into consideration but would not comment on whether he thought the United States would block the desired increase.

He said he hoped the report by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan expected in May will include a recommendation to double the quota.

Iraq is capable of exporting four times its current level of around 600,000 barrels per day under current prices, but Iraqis would still need much more revenue for their daily needs, Gen. Rasheed said.

Iraq resumed oil exports

on December 10 under the U.N. deal, the first easing of oil and trade sanctions imposed after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but food did not start arriving until March 20.

Iraq announced Tuesday it would hand out extra flour rations to its people this month after the first ships began delivering Australian and French wheat under the oil-for-food deal.

The SS Gunay docked at the Gulf port of Umm Qasr with 29,162 tonnes of French wheat late Monday, hours after the first vessel arrived with a shipment of Australian wheat.

"Both ships started unloading immediately and the dispatch (of the goods) to government warehouses has begun," said Eric Falt, the spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Baghdad.

Another four ships carrying French and Australian wheat are due to arrive in the next two days, he added.

Some 90,000 tonnes of food have reached Iraq since food started flowing into the sanctions-hit country on March 20 under the humanitarian deal with the United Nations, he said.

A total of 2.2 million tonnes of wheat flour, rice, sugar, cooking oil, salt, chick peas, white beans and tea is to be delivered to Iraq under

the deal.

Iraq announced Monday it would start distributing extra rations of wheat flour later in April, while the increased rations of other goods would start being handed out in May.

An Iraqi source said Monday that 14 ships carrying humanitarian supplies would arrive in the next few days.

U.N. officials said almost all of the ships are carrying French and Australian wheat totalling 250,000 tonnes.

Under the terms of the oil-for-food deal, Iraq can export \$2 billion of oil in six months.

The proceeds are earmarked for purchases of humanitarian goods, as well as to defray U.N. costs and compensate victims of the invasion.

Medicine as well as soap, detergents, educational supplies and equipment for power plants and sewage treatment plants are also allowed under the deal.

A total lifting of the sanctions depend on Iraq satisfying the United Nations Special Commission charged with overseeing the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq and UNSCOM remain at loggerheads over Baghdad's compliance with U.N. demands.



EXPLOSIONS IN GAZA: An Israeli officer collects evidence at the entrance of the Jewish settlement of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip where a Palestinian was blown apart in an explosion on Monday. The Palestinian National Authority accused the Israeli army of carrying out one of two bombings which killed one man and wounded seven people (AFP photo)

Palestinian state is essential for success of peace process — Rifai

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan's ambassador to Israel said Monday that establishment of a Palestinian state was essential for successfully concluding the Middle East peace process.

"There must be a Palestinian state," said Ambassador Omar Rifai in a speech at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv, adding that the need for such a state was not a matter of preference but a fact.

Mr. Rifai said Jordan, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, is "in an impossible situation" because of the growing tensions between the Palestinians and the hard-line government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Mr. Netanyahu has strongly opposed Palestinian statehood, saying they should suffice with a generous form of autonomy instead. A final peace settlement is supposed to be worked out by 1999.

"We continue to adhere to peace with Israel (and) we believe that we must work with the Netanyahu government to advance the peace process. On this stance we receive tough criticism from

the entire Arab World," said Mr. Rifai.

The Jerusalem Post adds: Following the Arab League decision to recommend halting the normalisation of relations with Israel, Jordan remains the only country in the region that is promoting the peace process, the ambassador said.

"We may be the only government in the region that is promoting the peace process at the moment," Ambassador Rifai said.

Addressing Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, Rifai said neither Amman nor Cairo will be affected by the Arab League foreign ministers' recommendation to sever ties, close diplomatic offices and reinstate the Arab economic boycott.

"The decisions basically state that the Arab states should reconsider their relations with Israel," Mr. Rifai said. "I think they leave it up to the states concerned. This decision does not apply to Jordan and Egypt which have signed peace treaties that are binding in international law. The rationale, the thinking

behind this, is that you can't have normalisation on one track and the peace process on the other. One doesn't go without the other."

Mr. Rifai said although the peace process is in danger, Jordan remains committed to warm relations with Israel. He added that King Hussein and Mr. Netanyahu have a "good working relationship."

"We are still talking peace although we are in a crisis," he said. "Peace is not an accident of history. It is a systematic process."

The ambassador said his country is willing to help mediate between Israel and the Palestinians. He said the Kingdom's vision of a final status settlement on the territories is one "that will satisfy both sides. We're not talking about historical rights. We're talking about compromise. Jordan will support any deal that will be reached by Israel and the Palestinians."

But Mr. Rifai said such a deal must involve a Palestinian state. "It's a Palestinian right," he told his audience, adding "I know this is not music to your ears."

Sudanese rebels claim more gains

NAIROBI (R) — Sudanese rebel leader John Garang said on Tuesday rebels seized four districts in northeast Sudan in an offensive aimed at cutting Khartoum's main link with the outside world.

He said a coalition of rebels "liberated" the districts of Karora, Itarba, Agiti and Agiti last week and over the weekend and were advancing towards the town of Tokar.

Colonel Garang, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and military commander of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), said NDA forces were destroying Khartoum's "military and

security machine" in the northeast.

"The citizens of the four districts have returned to their normal life and are forming their civil administrations from within the local population," Col. Garang said in a statement issued by the SPLA office in the Eritrean capital Asmara.

He said relatives and families of more than 100 prisoners of war seized by rebels in the last week should know they were in safe hands and were receiving "the good treatment they deserve."

In Khartoum, the army journal Al Nasr said on Tuesday that independent

militias killed 70 SPLA guerrillas and captured 18 in an attack on the rebels near Akobo on the Ethiopian border in the south on Monday.

The rebels say the north-east offensive is aimed at cutting the road between Khartoum and Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

Tokar is 150 kilometres southeast of Port Sudan, the main link for Africa's largest country to the rest of the world.

The nearest stretch of the 670 kilometres road from Khartoum to Port Sudan is about 100 kilometres north-west of Tokar, which is another 100 kilometres northwest of Karora.

Tough U.S. law on illegal aliens in effect

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A tough new immigration law went into effect Tuesday after an 11th-hour reversal on a court decision to delay enforcement in a bid to prevent panic among illegal aliens.

Monday, a federal judge ordered a four-day delay on grounds U.S. immigration officials had not allowed enough time to inform the public about the stiff new regulations but the ruling was overturned just after midnight, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) said Tuesday.

Under the new law, all illegal immigrants must leave the country within six months. Those who leave after the stipulated period risk being barred from reentering the United States even with a valid visa for up to 10 years.

That prospect sent hoards of aliens to legal aid clinics — and to the alter — mistakenly fearing they would be deported on April 1 if they did not apply for citizenship or marry U.S. residents.

The widespread alarm prompted Judge Emmett Sullivan to block the law until Saturday arguing that people needed more time to get information on the law.

He also ruled that the INS violated its own rules by not allowing a 30-day waiting period between publishing the new regulations and their enactment. The law was published on March 6.

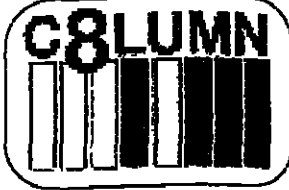
But the delay was overturned in a U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, acting on an appeal by the Justice Department which countered that a delay would significantly complicate its efforts.

The new law, a sweeping effort to deter illegal immigration passed in the midst of an anti-immigrant backlash last year, aims to beef up barriers to all forms of unauthorised immigration into the United States.

Key changes would make it easier for U.S. officials to expel illegal immigrants and keep them out for many years and to stop more illegals at the U.S. border.

Under the new law, border officials would also have broader authority to keep would-be illegal immigrants out of the country.

In a major legal change, those apprehended in the United States would be required to demonstrate why they are entitled to remain in the country. Current law instead requires U.S. officials to show why an illegal alien should be deported.



'New-found' Maugham text?

SINGAPORE (R) — The tale told on Tuesday of two cleaners unearthing a long-lost manuscript by late British author Somerset Maugham in Singapore's colonial-era Raffles Hotel turned out sadly for his fans to be untrue. A hotel spokeswoman told Reuters the Straits Times newspaper story of the discovery of a 400-page handwritten manuscript in a disused basement was an April fool's joke. It said "the sacred flame" was written on faded hotel stationery and wrapped between the covers of an old tiffin room menu. The famed hotel, where Maugham often stayed, was completely refurbished in the early 1990s. The newspaper's page two story said the hotel had faxed copies of the manuscript to Maugham experts in Britain who, thoroughly excited, were eager to head for Singapore to authenticate the original.

Taiwan group to pray for dead pigs

TAIPEI (R) — A Taiwan Buddhist group said on Monday it planned to erect a shrine and pray for better next lives for the more than one million hogs destroyed during the recent outbreak of a deadly epidemic. "We will erect a small monument on Wednesday in front of the Taipei County Institute of Animal Health and perform a Buddhist rite there to pray for the deceased hogs," said Tseng-Huang Li-Ming of the Fukuangshan Buddhist Association. More than one million hogs have been killed in an army-led eradication scheme to curb the spread of the highly contagious foot-and-mouth disease, which has erupted in more than 1,000 hog farms in Taiwan since March 19. "From the Buddhist point of view, the previous life of a hog was a person who became a hog in this life as punishment for bad deeds he or she had done before," Tseng-Huang said.

Stallone building home in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — U.S. actor Sylvester Stallone is building a mansion and a series of luxurious houses near Argentina's eastern mountain town of San Carlos de Bariloche, real estate sources said Tuesday. Stallone reportedly was drawn to the region after U.S. television tycoon Ted Turner bought a ranch in the Nahuel Huapi national park last year. Stallone paid \$8 million for 14,000 hectares of woodland containing numerous lakes and trout streams.

Titohad 'underground city'

BELGRADE (AFP) — Marshal Tito, the former communist strongman of Yugoslavia, built an "underground city" under his residence in Belgrade, a new independent daily reported in its inaugural issue Tuesday. The complex, made of marble and wood, was built to be "anti-atomic," had its own power supply and included apartments, military command and observation posts, a telecommunications centre and conference rooms, the report in the Gradjanin (citizen) said. Several dozen people could live there "comfortably for several months," the daily said, adding that the existence of the complex remained a "state secret." Quoting "witnesses who stayed there," Gradjanin said that the complex was connected by underground tunnels to several houses in the Dedinje residential suburb of Belgrade.

Turks in Germany hold vigil for arson victims

KREFELD, Germany (AFP) — Members of this west German town's Turkish community held a vigil overnight at the site of an arson fire that killed three people from the same family.

Candles were placed in front of the 13-storey building where the fire broke out on Monday killing a 41-year-old woman and a 16-year-old girl who died after jumping from the window of their third-floor apartment to try to escape the flames.

Firemen also discovered the body of a 17-year-old adolescent in the apartment, which was totally destroyed.

Two other young girls were seriously injured after jumping from the building. Turkey's Anadolu news agency later put the death toll at four, quoting hospital officials.

But a police spokesman said Tuesday he was not aware of any other fatalities.

The father of the family, who was in a nearby bar when the fire started, has been placed under police protection.

Police said they were treating the blaze as arson after finding traces of an inflammable substance in the burnt-out flat.

However, detectives said it was too early to say whether the attack had been "racially or politically motivated."

According to initial findings, the fire began at around 2:00 a.m. (0000 GMT) in the Turkish family's apartment for as yet unknown reasons.

The incident prompted some 1,000 people on Monday to take part in a demonstration in Krefeld to show solidarity with the victims.

Overnight Monday, another suspicious fire destroyed the home of a Turkish family in the western town of Haiger Seelbach, police said. One of the family members who was alone in the house at the time of the fire was slightly injured while trying to flee the flames.

Yemeni court rules today on death sentence for gunman

SANAA (AFP) — Yemen's appeals court will decide Wednesday whether to uphold a death sentence imposed on an Afghan war veteran who killed six people in a shooting spree at two schools, judicial sources said Tuesday.

After two hours of deliberations, appeals court President Judge Mohammad Al Wadai told a court room here packed with 2,000 people and ringed by heavy security that he would make a final decision in open court on Wednesday.

Mohammad Al Nadhiri, 42, was sentenced to death by firing squad at a lightning trial on Monday just one day after he opened fire with a Kalashnikov assault rifle on teachers and students at two schools in Sanaa.

Nadhiri, a building contractor, wore a grey robe as he sat impassively through most of the proceedings flanked by two police officers, although from time-to-time he smiled or made signs at his children sitting in the court.

He again insisted he carried out the massacre to avenge the rape of his eight-year-old daughter by an administrator at the Talaah school, where he began his shooting spree.

The court on Monday rejected his defence after a medical examination of his daughter.

Asked if he regretted his actions, Nadhiri said: "It is destiny that has brought this about... I ask the court to protect my children."

The state prosecutor told the court Tuesday that a sixth victim had died from their injuries, and he demanded Nadhiri be executed at a spot between the two schools and that his body be crucified.

Legal experts said Nadhiri could still appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal, and as a last resort make a plea for clemency from President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Four of his five children including daughter Hitaf, the victim of the alleged sexual assault, accompanied their father during Sunday's shooting spree.

According to neighbours, the bearded Nadhiri, a veteran of the war against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, was an Islamist who was critical of the mixing of boys and girls in schools.

Nadhiri sprayed students at the Talaah school with bullets as they prepared to file into class on Sunday. He then moved on to the nearby Musa Ben Nusair school, shooting passersby on the way, and opened fire at random.

Among the dead were the Egyptian headmistress of the Talaah School and a teacher at the Musa Ben Nusair School. Ten other people were injured.

Israel's actions renew its own isolation

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel found itself plunged four years into the past Tuesday, facing a wall of Arab and Muslim hostility which the Middle East peace process had made great progress chipping away.

The rising tensions were illustrated by an exchange of virulent charges between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday, each accusing the other of sabotaging the peace process.

The crisis sparked by Mr. Netanyahu's decision to begin construction last month of a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem brought not only violent protests from Palestinians but threats of diplomatic reprisals from a

mobilised Arab World.

At a weekend meeting, the Arab League called for a freeze in normalisation with Israel and demanded the closure of representative offices opened in the Jewish state over the past four years by Mauritania, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia.

For Israel, the move jeopardised one of the main achievements of the peace process since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) signed their mutual recognition pact in 1993 — the start of the Jewish state's integration into the region.

Mr. Mubarak was much pointed, calling Netanyahu's hardline policies "very dangerous" for the entire Middle East. In an interview in the

Israeli newspaper Maariv, Mr. Mubarak said the "peace process has not degenerated to such a level since 1977" — a reference to the groundbreaking visit to occupied Jerusalem by his assassinated predecessor Anwar Sadat.

"I am very worried about what is going to happen," Mr. Mubarak said, Israel has "managed to frighten the whole world, relations between Israel and the Arab states have never been worse," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu was quick to respond to the broadside, accusing the Egyptian leader of "carrying out a systematic campaign of slander against Israel."

"The Egyptian government is playing a negative role in the peace process,"

he said accusing the Egyptian leaders of double dealing. "It tells the United States that it is helping Israel open doors to the Arab World while in fact it is doing everything in its power to close these doors," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu blamed Egypt for "prompting a hardening of the Arab World's position" which led to the Arab League call over the weekend for a freeze in normalisation.

"Threats of a boycott will not force us to give in a centimetre and the Palestinians must get rid of this idea that Jerusalem will one day be divided again," he said, adding that his government ruled out any halt to construction at Jabal Abu Ghneim.

Israeli opposition leader Shimon Peres, a key architect of the peace process, also entered the fray to deplore "Israel's growing isolation in the world."

"It would be a fatal mistake to destroy the peace process," he said on Israel Radio, adding that Mr. Netanyahu's actions had left him "very worried over Israel's security and the danger of the United States abandoning the peace process."

Yossi Beilin, the former Labour minister in charge of the peace process, also expressed his regret that the current right-wing government had turned Israel back into "an isolated island surrounded by hostile Arab masses."